

# **THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**



**BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOKS SERIES**

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# **THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

Volume Four

by

Harold Fowler



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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### MATTHEW'S METHOD

In connection with this chapter two significant, apparent contradictions appear in Matthew's writing. From a careful reading of John 12:1-8, 12-19 with attention to chronological detail, it is clear that, upon arriving in the Jerusalem area, Jesus and the Twelve stopped for the evening at Bethany. Then, the day before the Triumphal Entry, He was anointed by Mary during a supper in the house of Simon the leper. Next day (John 12:12), He organized and executed the Royal Messianic Entry into Jerusalem (John 12:14-19). Matthew and Mark, however, reserve their narration of the supper and the anointing in Bethany until later in their text, thus giving the impression that this latter event did not occur until late in the Last Week. (Cf. Matt. 26:6-13 = Mark 14:3-9 in context.) It must be noticed, however, that neither Matthew nor Mark introduces the section in question with strict, chronological precision. Rather, both use the indefinite formula: "Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper . . .," without specifying when that took place. Further, what must not be missed in Matthew and Mark is the fact that it was precisely because of what occurred at the anointing in Bethany that Judas Iscariot went away to bargain with the chief priests to betray Jesus (Matt. 26:14ff. = Mark 14:10ff.). This is the cause, although he waited until later to present himself to the authorities. (Cf. Matt. 26:3-5, 14-16 = Mark 14:1f., 10f. = Luke 22:1-6.) This is no hazarded guess, because John informs us that it had been the thief, Judas Iscariot, that had objected so strenuously to the "waste" of money involved in the lavish anointing at Bethany (John 12:4ff.). It was to Judas that Jesus addressed His rebuke. The solution, then, to the apparent contradiction is that John records the Bethany supper in its normal time sequence and clearly identified Judas as the trouble-maker, whereas Matthew and Mark prefer to link Judas' later perfidy with the Bethany supper by means of a historical flash-back.

The second problem apparent in Matthew's narration is the way he rearranges the chronology of the cleansing of the temple and the withering of the fig tree. Mark states that Jesus did nothing in Jerusalem on the day of the triumphal entry (Mark 11:11), cursed the fig tree next morning on the way to Jerusalem from Bethany (Mark 11:12-14), then cleansed the temple (Mark 11:15-19). Matthew, on

the other hand, gives the clear impression that the culminating act of the triumphal entry was the cleansing of the temple (Matt. 21:12ff.) which was followed on Monday by the cursing of the fig tree (12:18f.) and the disciples' amazement apparently immediately thereafter (Matt. 21:20ff.). Mark, on the other hand, reserves the disciples' amazement for Tuesday (Mark 11:20). Here again it must be noticed that Matthew does not date the cleansing of the temple as occurring on the same day as the triumphal entry, even if a cursory reading would lead to this conclusion. Further, the expression "early" (*proi*, Matt. 21:18) does not mean "in the morning" in the same sense as "next day" (*tê epaurion*, Mark 11:12). So, while Mark intends to indicate the sequence of days, Matthew is giving the time of day without indicating on what day the cursing of the fig tree occurred.

Mark's is evidently the more detailed account, stating chronologically what actually happened. Matthew, on the other hand, aiming at succinctness, merely telescoped his version without denying that the disciples' amazement and Jesus' teaching occurred the following day. In fact, Matthew does not affirm "WHEN the disciples saw" that the fig tree had withered. His circumstantial participle (*kaì idòntes hoi mathetai ethaùmasan . . .*) affirms nothing about the chronology of the withering and the seeing, because its purpose is only to say that whenever it was that the disciples saw it, they marvelled. (See notes on Matt. 21:19f.) Matthew's method has the advantage of keeping together the two separate parts by welding them into one didactic unit.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE OUTLINES

- Section 54 Jesus Enters in Messianic Triumph into Jerusalem (21:1-11)
- Section 55 Jesus Cleanses Temple a Last Time and Receives Worship of Children (21:12-17)
- Section 56 Jesus Curses Fig Tree and Teaches Disciples Faith (21:18-22)
- Section 57 Jesus Meets Challenges of His Authority (21:23-45)
  - A. The Authority Behind John's Baptism (21:23-27)
  - B. The Parable of Two Sons (21:28-32)
  - C. The Parable of Vineyard Let Out to Unworthy Tenants (21:33-45)

## THE MESSIANIC TRIUMPH

### STUDY OUTLINE

#### THE MESSIANIC TRIUMPH (21:1-11)

- I. The decision to depend on lowly donkeys (21:1-3)
- II. The Deliverer's divine dignity shows by divesting Himself of it (21:4, 5)
- III. The excited crowd expects the fulfilment of their dreams (21:6-9)
- IV. The dim-sighted demonstrate the unbelief that determined their destiny (21:10)
- V. The disciples display their own conclusions (21:11)

#### THE TEMPLE CLEANSED (21:12-17)

- I. A radical restoration of repentance and renewal (21:12)
- II. A rational rebuke of this form of religion (21:13)
- III. The believers were rewarded for receiving the Redeemer (21:14)
- IV. Radiant rejoicing is offensive to the Pharisees (21:15a)
- V. A Refined Reminder (21:16)
- VI. A return for reflection and rest (21:17)

#### THE WITHERING OF THE FIG TREE (21:18-22)

- I. PUNISHMENT FROM GOD FOR HYPOCRISY AND BARRENNESS (21:18, 19)
  - A. The Sterile Fig Tree
    1. The justice of Jesus' expectation to find fruit on the tree: "Leaves promise fruit."
    2. His just expectation was disappointed: "Nothing but leaves."
    3. The justice of Jesus' judgment: He simply hastened the inevitable judgment that had to come in the course of nature.
  - B. The Polluted Temple (21:12-17, according to Mark's order of events)
- II. POWER FROM GOD THROUGH FAITH, PRAYER AND MERCY (21:20-22)
  - A. The Disciples' surprise (21:20; Mark 11:20, 21)
  - B. The Lord's lesson (21:21, 22; Mark 11:22-25)
    1. "Mountains of difficulty can be removed from the path of duty by undivided trust" (21:21).
    2. "Trusting prayer, confident of God's power and concern, is assured of its answer" (21:22).

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JESUS' AUTHORITY CHALLENGED (21:23-45)

- I. THE AUTHORITIES ATTACK: "PRODUCE YOUR ORDERS!" (21:23).  
The authorities attack: "Produce your orders!" (21:23).
- II. JESUS COUNTERATTACKS: "JOHN'S AUTHORITY IS INDICATIVE OF MINE" (21:24-27).
  - A. Before being given new revelations, you must face previous ones fairly.
  - B. If John's authority was from God, listen to him, since he testified to me.
  - C. If you cannot discern John's authority, by what right do you seek to judge mine, when your admission of disability disqualifies you?
  - D. John was called directly by God to serve, without human authorization: I am too.
- III. JESUS DRIVES FOR DECISION: "DECIDE ON AN OBJECTIVE CASE: THE STORY OF THE TWO SONS" (21:28-32).
  - A. Religious outcasts and rank sinners repent and are considered qualified to enter God's Kingdom.
  - B. Religious professionals do not repent and are rightly rejected by God.
  - C. Although repentant sinners precede the more respectable sinners, opportunity is yet available for a change of mind.
- IV. JESUS SHOWS HIS PROPER PLACE IN GOD'S ETERNAL PROGRAM WHILE REVEALING THE FATE OF THOSE WHO OPPOSE HIM (21:33-45).
  - A. Bountiful mercy (21:33)
  - B. Mercy's rights (21:34)
  - C. Mercy outraged (21:35)
  - D. Increased guilt versus incredible patience (21:36)
  - E. Mercy resolute (21:37)
  - F. Mercy mistaken for weakness (21:38)
  - G. Mercy rejected (21:39)
  - H. Mercy finally ended (21:40)
  - I. Mercy offered to others (21:41)
  - J. Mercy's victory (21:42)
  - K. The reading of the sentence (21:43)
  - L. Double punishment inflicted (21:44)
  - M. Jesus' story hit home (21:45)
  - N. The clergy fumbles its responsibility (21:46)

Section 54

JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM IN MESSIANIC TRIUMPH

(Parallels: Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19)

TEXT 21:1-11

1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and came unto Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying unto them, Go into the village that is over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose *them*, and bring *them* unto me. 3 And if any one say aught unto you, ye shall say, the Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

4 Now this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying,

5 Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, Meek, and riding upon an ass, And upon a colt the foal of an ass.

6 And the disciples went, and did even as Jesus appointed them, 7 and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their garments; and he sat thereon. 8 And the most part of the multitude spread their garments in the way; and others cut branches from the trees, and spread them in the way. 9 And the multitudes that went before him, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, Who is this?

11 And the multitudes said, This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Men usually conceive of Jesus as a mild-mannered gentleman too humble for such ostentatious display as we see clearly occurring during His entry into Jerusalem here. Why do you think Jesus would desire to ride into Jerusalem? And why on such an animal?
- b. Why do you suppose Jesus sent two disciples to get the donkeys—would not one disciple have sufficed to bring them back?
- c. Why would Jesus instruct the men to take the animals without first asking permission of the owner?
- d. Do you think there was any virtue in riding upon a colt that has never been broken for riding? If so, what? If not, why not?

- e. Do you see anything significant about Jesus' prepared answer: "The Lord has need of them"? Does the Lord really need anything—much less a pair of donkeys?! If so, what does this tell you about Him?
- f. Why did Jesus order them to bring two animals when one would have sufficed?
- g. How did Jesus know about the donkeys tethered outside the doorway of a house in a street over at Bethphage? Did some disciple tell Him about them? Had He already prearranged for His borrowing them at this later time?
- h. Why, when the disciples brought Jesus the donkey and her colt, did they blanket both of them with their robes? Did they think He could ride both of them?! And why, when Jesus had the larger animal available, did He choose to ride the colt?
- i. What do you think is Matthew intending to convey to his readers by including a prophecy that he himself does not quote verbatim and actually changes by mixing another prophet's words together with the one he quotes? Is this proper? Matthew left out of his quotation "triumphant and victorious is he" (RSV) or "just and having salvation" (ASV). Do you think this omission is significant?
- j. Do you think the Apostles and nearer disciples understood what was taking place during the Triumphal Entry?
- k. Usually, pictures of the triumphal entry show people waving palm branches in the air. What does the Bible say was the main purpose for the greenery cut for use that day?
- l. Explain the conduct and mentality of this crowd that praises God for the mighty works Jesus did and that shouts joyfully its happiness with Jesus as the Prophet and as Son of David, the King and Ambassador of the Lord. What did they expect the "coming kingdom of our father David" to be? To what, in their minds, is this procession going to lead?
- m. Explain the Lord's thinking behind this scenario: what were some of His feelings as He rode along? (Cf. Luke 19:40-44.) In what sense is it true that He actually *needed* these donkeys, i.e. what part did they play in His planning?
- n. Why would the people of Jerusalem, agitated by the excitement caused by Jesus' entry, have to ask, "Who is this?" Do you think they had absolutely no idea as to His identity?
- o. Why do you think that the crowds answered the Jerusalemites' question, "Who is this?" by saying, "This is the Prophet, Jesus of Nazareth of Galilee"?

- p. Mark informs us that Jesus went into the temple, but, as it was already late, He merely looked round at everything and went out to Bethany with the Twelve (Mark 11:11). Why do you suppose Jesus did not attack the temple corruption immediately that day while popular support was great and enthusiasm for His cause highest? What could be gained by waiting until the next morning (Mark 11:12, 15)?
- q. How does the triumphal entry harmonize with everything that Jesus had taught previously? How does the Entry, as Jesus conceived of it, perfectly reflect His thinking, rather than the usual world conqueror's ambition?
- r. On what basis would you explain the fickleness of some of Jesus' well-wishers evident in their willingness one day to shout "Hosanna" and later "Crucify Him!'"? Do you think *everyone* did this? Why or why not?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

On the next day after the anointing of Jesus by Mary in Bethany, just six days before the Passover, a large number of pilgrims who had come to the Passover festival heard that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. So they took palm branches and went out to meet Him, cheering: "Hosanna! Blessings upon Him who comes as God's Ambassador, even the King of Israel!"

Meanwhile Jesus and His disciples had almost reached Jerusalem, having come as far as the little towns of Bethphage and Bethany, situated on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus sent two of the disciples on ahead with these instructions: "Go into the village just ahead of you. Just as you enter it you will find a donkey tethered with her colt that has never been broken for riding. Unhitch them and bring them here to me. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' or 'Why are you doing this?' or says anything to you, just reply, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them back with you."

This took place to fulfil what was predicted by the prophet Zechariah (9:9f.):

Tell Jerusalem and its inhabitants: Here is your King: He is coming to you in gentleness, riding on a donkey, Yes, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.

So those disciples went off on their mission and followed Jesus' instructions and found everything just as He said they would. They

found the colt tethered by a doorway out on a street corner, like He said. As they were untying the colt, its owners who stood there, demanded an explanation: "What are you doing there, untying that colt?"

And they made the reply that Jesus had furnished: "The Lord needs it." So the men let them take them. They brought the ass and the colt to Jesus, flung their robes over them like a saddle-blanket and helped Jesus to get on. He mounted the colt and sat on the garments. This had been described in Scripture:

Do not be afraid, city of Zion: see, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!

His disciples did not understand this at the time. Later, however, when Jesus had been exalted to glory, they remembered that the Scripture said this about Him and that this was in fact what had been done for Him.

Now as He rode along, most of the crowd began carpeting the road with their own robes, while others cut down branches from the trees and still others spread His path with boughs they had cut from the fields. As He approached the place where the road follows the slope down the Mount of Olives, the whole procession—those in front of Jesus that came out of Jerusalem to meet Him, as well as those who followed behind Him,—in their joy began to sing aloud their praises to God for all the tremendous miracles they had seen Jesus do. (In fact, the crowd that had been present when Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, kept telling what they had witnessed. This is why the crowd went out to meet Him: they had heard that He had performed this miraculous sign of His mission.) They were chanting: "Hurrah for the Son of David! God bless the King who comes in the Name of the Lord! Blessings on the coming kingdom of our father David! Praise be to God in the highest heaven! May there be peace in heaven and glory to God in the highest heavens!"

Some Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, restrain your disciples!"

But He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would burst out cheering!"

Then the Pharisees said to each other, "You see? There is nothing you can do! Why, the whole world is running off after Him!"

When He came in sight of the city, He wept over it, saying, "If you only knew at this late date the things on which your peace depends. . . . Now, however, you cannot see it. In fact, the time will

come when your enemies will raise siegeworks all around you and surround you, blockading you from every direction. They will level you to the ground, and your children within your walls. They will not leave you one stone in its place, all because you did not recognize that God had visited you!"

And when He entered Jerusalem, a shock wave of excitement shook the whole city. "Who IS this?" people asked. And the crowds kept saying, "This is the Prophet, Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee." And He went into the temple courts, where He looked at the whole scene, noticing everything that was going on. But, as it was already late in the afternoon, He went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

### SUMMARY

Upon His arrival in the Jerusalem area Jesus organized a public demonstration of His royal Messiahship, wherein He rode into the city amidst the popular acclaim of Israel. His mild manner, when contrasted with worldly triumphs, served to underline the perfect, profound harmony between His methodology and that predicted by the prophet Zechariah. He refused to concede the opposition's demand that He desist by silencing the popular praise, while at the same time He foresaw the nation's fall because of popular rejection of His mission. His Messianic entry caused the otherwise indifferent to ask who it was that caused this uproar. The happy crowds described Him as "the Prophet Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee."

### NOTES

21:1 **And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem**, Jesus and His disciples were arriving from Jericho where He had saved Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) and healed blind Bartimaeus and his friend (Matt. 20:29 = Mark 10:46ff. = Luke 18:35ff.). If Jesus left Jericho in the morning, He and His group could have walked the 25 km (15 mi.) road uphill to Jerusalem that day. John informs us that the Lord arrived in Bethany in the eastern outskirts of Jerusalem, while the other travellers presumably continued on to Jerusalem to seek lodging for the night. (Cf. John 12:2, 12.) While in Bethany, either Friday evening after the long journey or Saturday evening after the Sabbath, a supper was offered in Jesus' honor in the house of Simon the leper, at which time Mary, sister of Lazarus, anointed Him with precious ointment (Matt. 26:6-13 = Mark 14:3-9 = John 12:1-8).

Just when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem is not stated by Matthew, but by John, who dates Jesus' arrival as "six days before the Passover" (John 12:1). John states that "a great crowd of the Jews learned that He was there (at Bethany) and they came, not only on account of Jesus, but also to see Lazarus whom He had raised from the dead" (John 12:9). Time, therefore, is necessary for word to spread among the festal pilgrims, inciting them to hurry to Bethany. Further, more time is required for this excitement to be reported back to the authorities (John 12:10f.).

Note how Matthew and Mark introduce their account with: "while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper." They may have done this, not only because they recount their story out of chronological order, but perhaps because a stay of some time was involved, i.e. Friday night and Saturday too. Word got around that Jesus had come, so the streets of Bethany were filled Saturday evening with people curious to see Jesus and Lazarus. Next day (John 12:12), or Sunday morning, Jesus launched the messianic entry into Jerusalem.

In light of the above, Matthew's expression, **and came unto Bethphage**, is not intended to ignore or deny Jesus' stop in Bethany, since our Apostle intends to recount this event later (26:6ff.). Rather, his mention of Bethphage is intended to say, simply, that Jesus will start the triumphal entry from this general staging area. Bethany and Bethphage were apparently two little villages not far apart on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem. Today, unfortunately, no trace of Bethphage remains, while Bethany is identified in the Arab town of El 'Azariyeh. Nor is it any longer possible to affirm just how the ancient roads would have approached Jerusalem from Jericho, or precisely which Jesus would have used during the triumphal entry. **The mount of Olives** is a ridge in the hill country of Judea, parallel to mount Zion or Moriah on which Jerusalem is built and separated from the latter by the narrow Kedron Valley (Valley of Jehoshaphat). Because the elevation of the temple area of Jerusalem is 744 meters (2440 ft.) as opposed to Olivet's 814 m (2670 ft.), when Jesus arrived at the crest of Olivet, He could have looked across the Kedron Valley that separated the two parallel eminences and seen all Jerusalem laid out before Him. Because the western part of the city back of the temple area rises from 30 to 40 meters (100-300 ft.), He would have been able, from His vantage point, to see buildings even farther away on that side of the city. In fact, the entire city seems laid out, map-like below the viewer,

with the map slightly raised in back so that it slopes toward the viewer. This detail is vividly recalled by Luke (19:41). While in Bethany, however, Jerusalem would be out of sight on the other side of the hill. Thus, He first saw the City when He approached it over the top of Olivet during the Messianic entry.

It is not unlikely that **Jesus sent two disciples**, because, although one man accustomed to handling animals could easily bring back the mare which would be followed by the colt, He preferred to use two men on this errand as on others. (Cf. Mark 6:7; Luke 9:51; 10:1; Mark 14:13). Further, "the testimony of two men is valid" (cf. John 8:17), hence would more likely be credible for anyone challenging their right to take the donkeys. *Jesus sent*: this deliberate choice, when seen in context with all of the public notice He sought throughout the rest of this day, His accepting Messianic praise from the crowd, His adamant refusal to silence the people's joyous acclamation when the Pharisees demanded it, is but the beginning of a deliberate assertion of His Messiahship and His invitation to the nation to acknowledge Him as such.

21:2 **saying unto them, Go into the village that is over against you.** If Jesus spent Saturday night in Bethany (John 12:1-11), He is now there looking in the direction of Bethphage that now lay "just ahead of you," to which He directs two Apostles. **Ye shall find an ass tied:** near the entrance to the village "immediately as you enter it" (Mark 11:2). They easily located the animals in question "tied at the door out in the open street" (Mark 11:4). It is impossible to decide whether the animals' owner lived in the house in Bethphage, or whether He were merely a Passover guest. Although normally animals would be led through a doorway into a courtyard surrounded by the house with its connecting buildings, their owner could have left them hitched out on the street for some other reason. Had the owner promised Jesus they would be left there?

Mark and Luke describe the colt as one "on which no one has ever yet sat." Does this fact suggest the usual qualification of an animal to be consecrated to the Lord? (Cf. Num. 19:2; Deut. 21:3.) If so, it is surprising that Matthew entirely ignores this detail so suggestive to a Jewish reader. However, even non-Jewish readers could appreciate the choice of an animal to be ridden for the first time in an unusual situation (Philistines, I Sam. 6:7).

**And a colt with her.** The ass-colt would not likely have been newborn, if it must be strong enough to carry Jesus. **Loose them and bring**

them unto me. See on 21:5 why Jesus desired both animals, not merely the colt.

21:3 And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, The Lord has need of them, and he will send them immediately. Some commentators see these instructions as furnishing evidences of divine foreknowledge: Jesus precisely (1) the number and kind of animals; (2) where they would be found; (3) the friendly, willing reaction of their owner. Support offered for this conclusion is as follows:

1. Some see a parallel between these rapid-fire orders concerning the finding of the donkeys and the arrangements for finding and preparing the upper room for the Passover (Mark 14:12-16 = Luke 22:7-13), in both of which His miraculous insight is thought to be discernible.
2. Luke's expression, "they found it just as he had told them," *heûron kathôs eîpen autoîs*; 19:32), communicates the impression that Jesus used supernatural knowledge, by pointing to the precise correspondence (*kathôs* = "just as") between Jesus' prediction and what the men encountered at Bethphage.
3. Although Matthew's expression seems weaker than that of Luke ("they did just as *kathôs*, Jesus had directed them," 21:6), Plummer (*Matthew*, 294f.) sees supernatural knowledge implied even here, since the Apostles could not even have done as He had appointed "if what they found had not agreed with what He had foretold."
4. The strongest argument for supernatural knowledge is the exact timing: Jesus, even as He was speaking, knew that both animals were tied at the door of a house precisely at the moment He needed them and was ordering His disciples to go bring them back.

The weakness of this conclusion lies in the following unprovable presuppositions: (1) It is assumed that in the Gospels we have absolutely every detail of this event. (2) It is assumed Jesus had never previously talked with the donkeys' owner about borrowing the animals for precisely this use at this time; (3) It is assumed that the owner himself was not a Galilean disciple traveling with Jesus, but a dweller in Bethphage who hardly knew Jesus. Nevertheless, other principles would also lead us to discount the above conclusion:

1. The parsimony of miracles. The sobriety with which Bible writers refuse to multiply miracles, in contrast to apocryphal miracle-mongers, and the Lord's own habit of not resorting to supernatural means where natural ones were available, would suggest

prudence in pronouncing the event in question as miraculous, especially where our Evangelists do not so pronounce it.

2. The confessed incompleteness of Gospel records. (Cf. John 20:30; 21:25.) Not only are whole events omitted, but also unimportant details in those recorded. By simply inventing another series of possible details, it is possible to see that no miracle was intended by the Evangelists. Jesus had been to the Bethany-Bethphage areas just a few months before (John 11:17f.) and could have prearranged everything with the donkeys' owner then, so that it would only have been necessary to send a couple of men to bring the donkeys. Further, the owner, either a disciple or sympathetic to Jesus' cause, may have promised to leave the animals tied in that particular place, beginning about Saturday of the week just before Passover. **The Lord has need of them**, then becomes a password that indicates to the owner that the moment of which Jesus had spoken earlier had now arrived. This explanation furnished by Jesus to cover the taking of the donkeys, assumes that those who challenged the disciples know exactly who *the Lord* is. In fact, in Greek, *the lord* (*kùrios*) might refer generally to any gentleman. (Cf. Matt. 13:27; 20:8; 21:30, 40; 25:20, 22; 27:63; Luke 13:8, 25; 14:22; note the suggestive use of *kùrios* in Luke 19:33f.: "his lords said to them . . . the Lord has need of him.") For the animals' owners to let two valuable donkeys go off unaccompanied to some unknown "lord" or in the hands of strangers would have been the height of naivetè, if not downright folly. It is more likely that the owners were themselves disciples of "the Lord Jesus." They may have not even been local residents of Bethphage, but Galileans recently arrived in the Jerusalem area for the Passover and lodging with friends in Bethphage. This would explain the details of the text without seeing a miracle of divine knowledge where none was intended.

**The Lord has need of them:** observe how Jesus identifies Himself to the owners of the donkeys. If this expression is all He said, "it is clear, therefore, that this epithet was not an invention of the early church after Christ's departure . . . not something borrowed from a non-Christian culture. It came from the very mouth of Jesus" (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 764). Further, beyond the reason assigned for Matthew's citation of Zechariah at precisely this point (see on 21:4), we must see that Zechariah's prophecy is fulfilled by this paradoxical expression of Jesus' Lordship. It is *the Lord*,

not merely of His personal disciples, but the Owner of all things, that now *needs* the asses! What an amazing combination of sovereign dignity, with its authority and power, united with the painful need and destitution of poverty!

21:4 **Now this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet.** Note how eager Matthew is to make his point: no sooner has he described the procuring of the donkeys than he passes immediately to the main significance the reader must see in the event described. Reasons for this may be:

1. The very mode of procuring the donkeys is part of the main point:
  - a. Those who see supernatural insight exercised by Jesus, point to His divinity as forepictured by Zechariah.
  - b. It is more likely that Matthew means: "Jesus, whom I present to you as the Messiah of Israel, HAD TO BORROW something required for His purposes!" At first glance the casual reader could snort, "What's the matter: did He not BY RIGHT own sufficient means to avoid the embarrassment of having to requisition the property of others?! What kind of Christ IS this Nazarene, if he can point to no solid real estate, no institutions and property and no hard, countable results?" But this is precisely what Matthew is driving at! The citation of Zechariah's prophecy at this point decidedly meets this kind of thinking head-on by categorically asserting that God had promised just this sort of Messianic King to Israel.
2. Now, if Jesus be the Lord of the Universe, who is the donkeys' true Owner? Can He not make use of what is His own however and whenever He chooses? And is not such divine ownership in perfect harmony with Zechariah's picture of the divine Messiah?
3. By citing the prophecy now, rather than at the end of the section, Matthew induces his reader to begin to interpret the entire scene in the light of all of Zechariah's ideas relevant to the Messiah's coming.

The important question now is: what had Zechariah prophesied during the zenith of the Persian empire under Darius I (522-486 B.C.), Xerxes (or Ahasuerus, 486-465) and possibly Artaxerxes I (465-424)? Just as today, the reader of the Old Testament prophecies in Jesus' day needed to know something of the history contemporary to the prophets themselves, in order to make sense out of their writings. In fact, their prophecies were directed not merely to the future times

in which their later readers would be living, but also to events in the prophets' own times. For them, as for us, the historical connections were important to be able to see the mighty acts of God operative in and through the events. Thus, we may assume that Matthew depends upon the reader's appreciation of Zechariah's message in its proper historical context.

In chapters nine through thirteen, Zechariah described God's future program for both Israel and the Gentiles in terms of four basic emphases: (a) the blessing of Israel by the salvation and refining of a godly remnant; (b) the blessing of the nations by the salvation of a godly remnant from among the Gentiles; (c) the punishment of the ungodly nations who manifest their ungodliness by their hostility to Israel, and (d) the punishment of the ungodly in Israel through the destruction of the old order. Four times in this latter section Zechariah furnishes glimpses of the Servant-King Messiah and His ministry, ALL CITED BY MATTHEW:

1. The Messianic King and His reign (Zech. 9:8-10; cited by Matt. 21:5)
2. The Good Shepherd's ministry unappreciated by Israel and so terminated (Zech. 11:9-14; Matt. 27:9)
3. Israel's bitter wailing over the death of the Pierced One (Zech. 12:10-14; Matt. 24:30)
4. God's Shepherd smitten and His flock scattered (Zech. 13:7; Matt. 26:31)

Matthew does not cite all of Zechariah's messianic prophecies or prophetic allusions, leaving his readers to recall them. (Study Zech. 2:10f.; 3:8f.; 6:12-15.) In fact, he does not even quote Zechariah closely, choosing rather to utilize only certain suggestive portions, but they are heavy with meaning every time.

**Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!** This wording of Zechariah 9:9 Matthew has exchanged for Isaiah's graphic: **Tell the daughter of Jerusalem** (cf. Isa. 62:11), because, not only must the City of God be informed, since she cannot recognize her King who comes to her, but also because other great prophecies other than Zechariah's find their fulfillment in Him who so comes. (Study Isa. 61, 62.) Even John rewords this quotation, weaving in wording from Isaiah 40:9 (LXX) or 44:2. Jerusalem is strangely unable to rejoice because of her indifference toward Him

who was to prove to be her true King. Ironically, the rejoicing and shouting aloud expressed the infectious enthusiasm of only the multitudes of pilgrims present. Jerusalem was no more than mildly interested (21:10). **Lo, your king comes to you.** Zechariah's original readers might have supposed that the victorious conqueror of Syria and Philistia (Zech. 9:1-8) would set the style for the Messianic King, in the power and pomp of an Alexander the Great who so remarkably fulfilled Zechariah's words. Nevertheless, Jerusalem's righteous King has a style far different from the standard operating procedure of earthly rulers. He is to be:

1. **Your King**, i.e. the king that suits you, is best fitted for you, the one God has chosen for you, in contrast to foreigners or usurpers who set themselves up over you. He is to be no foreign Alexander nor usurping Herod. Although the King would be God Himself come to rule (cf. Zech. 2:10; 8:3; 14:9), He would also be fully Hebrew (cf. Deut. 17:14f.).
2. He **comes to you** at some unspecified future date. He had not therefore appeared on the political scene of the world in Zechariah's time nor would necessarily appear shortly after Alexander the Great, even if after him. This promise intended to inspire hope in the Coming One. By John's time, "the Coming One" had been transformed into a Messianic title. (John 1:15, 27; 3:31; 6:14; 11:27; 12:13; cf. Matt. 11:3; 21:9 and parallels.) But Zechariah 2:10 promised the COMING OF JAHWEH to His people, so in some way the Messianic King must either be God incarnate or somehow possessed of the fulness of deity.
3. **Righteous**, or just. (Cf. Jer. 23:5; Acts 3:14.) This describes His personal character, His moral principles and His personal practice. (Cf. Deut. 17:18-20.) His royal administration would be conducted on the basis of true justice and uncorrupted righteousness. Truth stands at the foundation of everything He says or does. (Cf. John 14:6; Rev. 19:11.) Consequently, He qualifies to be the means for making others righteous before God. (Cf. Isa. 53:11; I Peter 3:18; 2:21-25.) Why Matthew omitted this expression of Zechariah is not clear.
4. **Having salvation** (ASV) is also omitted by our author. Because of an ambiguity in Hebrew, two meanings are possible:
  - a. "One who is saved." This is based on the passive rendering of the Nifal verb form. It is not unlikely that Matthew should omit

this phrase because a Messianic King who Himself needed saving would be unthinkable to the righteous, and Matthew did not desire at this point to explain how the Messiah could have been saved, if He was Himself to be the Savior of all others. After the resurrection, however, the Apostles could shout, "God raised Him from the dead!" Accordingly, Zechariah would mean that the Lord would render Him justice after His rejection by men, by restoring Him His rightful honor after He had shown Himself the suffering Servant of Jahweh. (Zech. 3:8; 11:8-14; 12:10; 13:7; Isa. 53:10-12; cf. John 17:5.)

- b. "Victorious." The RSV is not incorrect thus to render the Nifal form (*nosha'*), because Nifal, while often passive, is also reflexive or reciprocal. (Cf. Nakarai, *Biblical Hebrew*, 28, 32; Gesenius, *Lexicon*, 374 has "conqueror"; see Ps. 33:16.) Thus, this interpretation would be: "saving Himself," hence, "victorious."
5. **Humble** or **meeek** translates *'ani*, rendered in Greek by *prauts* by Matthew and the LXX. Zechariah's word amplifies the Messiah's miserable condition, His lowliness as one afflicted, and His consequent mildness.

Although Keil (*Minor Prophets*, II, 334) may be right to note that *'ani* does not mean gentle, as if *prauts* were perfectly equivalent to the Hebrew word, because its primary sense is the humiliation of affliction, still there are numerous passages, like Psalm 68:10; Isaiah 41:17; 49:13; 51:21; 54:11 and Zephaniah 3:12, which speak of the nation of Israel from the point of view of its afflictions and low position. In such passages *'ani* gradually becomes equivalent to "the godly poor, the righteous who suffer, the godly servants of Jahweh who, however, are afflicted." This concept develops a moral and religious significance as these are distinguished as the people in whom faithfulness to Jahweh is maintained and spiritual religion developed. (*I.S.B.E.*, 2420b; cf. Num. 12:3; Ps. 10:12, 17f.; 22:26; 25:9; Prov. 3:34; 16:19; Isa. 29:19; 32:7; Zeph. 2:3.) Accordingly, Messiah embodies this character personally.

Therefore, the distinctively ethical flavor of *prauts* (Arndt-Gingrich, 705: "gentle, humble, considerate, meeek, unassuming") may not be absent from the mind of Zechariah, especially as he describes the Messiah. Nevertheless, the affliction of material poverty is never far from the meaning-potential of the prophecy.

6. **Riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.** This expression is unquestionably intended to define more precisely the Messiah's characteristic meekness, since no reader need be informed that any ass ridden by the Messiah would be a **colt the foal of an ass**. In fact, every ass is the colt of an ass! Hebrew parallelism in Zechariah's poetry does not necessarily require this expression for fulness, since he could have written some other harmonious line to complete his thought. Rather, Zechariah chose this double definition of Messiah's meekness, because of the peculiar image these words convey. (See below on "Why Two Donkeys?") While it is true that donkeys are not so despised in countries where they are in common use, as they are elsewhere, they have never enjoyed the prestige of the horse. In fact, both Zechariah (LXX) and Matthew picturesquely describe the colt as a *hypozugion*, literally "under the yoke," hence "a draft animal, beast of burden, pack animal," (Arndt-Gingrich, 852).

Horses have ever been the animal most prized for its strength, agility and speed. (Cf. Zech. 1:8; 6:1-7; 9:10; 10:3, 5; 12:4; 14:20.) Nevertheless, asses were used in war along with horses, mules and camels (Zech. 14:15). They were considered valuable property among wealthy people (Gen. 12:16; 22:3; 30:43; Job 42:12; I Chron. 27:30; I Sam. 9:3ff.). Although asses were a beast of burden in common use (cf. Isa. 1:3; I Chron. 12:40; more numerous than horses, mules and camels after the exile, Ezra 2:64ff.), even as in earlier times when Israel as yet possessed no horses, so they also remained in common use for riding even after Solomon's time. (Cf. Judg. 10:4; 12:14; II Sam. 17:23; 19:26; I Kings 2:40; 13:13-29; II Kings 4:24.)

Solomon's great interest in horses, however, underlines their supposed all-round superiority to donkeys and helps to explain why God prohibited Israel from depending upon horses for tactical military superiority. (Cf. Deut. 17:16 with II Kings 10:26-29; II Chron. 9:24f.) Horses may be appropriate symbols of war, but it does not necessarily follow that donkeys are symbols of peace. The donkey, as will be shown, may be rather the symbol of the common life as opposed to the prestigious one. It is only as the humility of the Messiah is seen in His riding an ass that His peace is seen. Peace is in the total prophecy, not in the donkey! *Meek*, in context, says: "Peaceful."

Rather than foster materialistic hopes, Zechariah clearly warned that God's Messianic King would not ride in triumph on a fiery-eyed Egyptian battle horse or in an imperial chariot, like an Alexander. Nor would He initiate a reign of arrogant cruelty, like that of a Herod or a Jewish Nero. More surprisingly than that, this divine King would not even appear to Israel on the clouds of heaven! Instead, like the common man of all times, He would appear as a peaceful citizen, riding a common, unimpressive beast of burden.

Josephus (*Contra Apion*, II, 7) thought of donkeys this way: "Asses are the same with us which they are with other wise men, viz. creatures that bear the burdens which we lay upon them; but if they come to our threshing-floors and eat our corn, or do not perform what we impose upon them, we beat them with a great many stripes; because it is their business to minister to us in our husbandry affairs." This was said in contrast to Egyptians who do honor to crocodiles and asps.

Zechariah's point of comparison is the more striking when it is observed how he emphasizes the total absence of any dependence upon the war chariots and horses upon which worldly kingdoms count so heavily for their power (Zech. 9:10). This very contrast between proud generals mounted upon richly decorated horses with flashing, ornamental harnesses and saddles, armed with battle bows and leading hordes of war chariots and on the one hand, and, on the other, the Messianic King, quietly riding unarmed into the City of God, mounted on a common donkey, unsaddled except for someone's robe tossed over its back, serves to deflate all nationalistic dreams of earthly power and exaltation connected with Jesus of Nazareth! He depicts a Kingdom that would not be established by a power struggle, nor would it depend upon worldly might for its stability. Any reader of Zechariah should conclude that, if the Messiah is to reign at all, especially over a worldwide dominion, He must gain this control by quite unworldly means. If not by tyrannical use of authority, He must conquer men's hearts by the persuasive force of His moral leadership, by the convincing power of His revealed truth and by the example of His humble service.

Matthew's style of quotation is perfect: not too much and not too little. Had he quoted Zechariah's next verse: "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off," he might have prematurely turned off the

pro-Zealot sympathizers among his readers, because of the evident non-violent approach predicated of Israel's Messiah. Had he quoted the following portion, "and he shall command peace to the nations," he might have unnecessarily enflamed the Gentile-hating reactions of nationalistic conservatives. And by not quoting the final portion, "his dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth," he did not excite futile hopes of a materialistic messianic kingdom. His citation focuses on the spiritual details just enough to spur his readers both to reread the ancient prophets and re-examine the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth in order that they might be smitten by the remarkable resemblance between the prediction and the fulfilment and be persuaded to surrender to Him.

In the same way Matthew did not cite all of Zechariah's words, Jesus did not personally or literally act out all of the prophet's message either. He did not instantly nor publicly eliminate the use of military to promote His kingdom (Zech. 9:10), even if He later refused Peter's offer to defend Him with the sword (Matt. 26:52) and affirmed the spiritual character of His reign before Pilate (John 18:36). Nor did He then and there proclaim peace to the Gentile nations (Zech. 9:10), and it has taken centuries for His dominion to be spread over the earth in world missionary movements. It is clear, then, that Jesus meant to draw attention to Himself in this vivid way which recalls the total prophecy of Zechariah, so that the thoughtful might examine the total Jesus-phenomenon in the light of the prophet's predictions, and conclude that Jesus of Nazareth was all that the prophet had pictured and more too. In fact, peace was proclaimed to the nations later. (Cf. Eph. 2:17; Acts 2:39.) Military might has also been eliminated as a means to advance His kingdom, because evangelism and patient teaching are the only methods permitted (Matt. 28:19f.; Mark 16:15f.; Luke 24:47; John 20:21ff., 30f.; Acts 1:8). Rather, His Royal Entry into Jerusalem perfectly harmonized with Jesus' earlier teaching in that He did not destroy His enemies by making political use of the opportunity and power unquestionably within His reach by virtue of His popular support and His miracle-working power. Rather, He pursued His usual course of quiet teaching and humble service even to the most undeserving.

**This is come to pass that it might be fulfilled.** The Lord Jesus had always intended to enter Jerusalem in precisely this manner, so He inspired Zechariah to announce that He would. Now He merely moved into human history to carry out what He said He would and in perfect harmony with the proper interpretation of His own prophecy.

As on so many other occasions (cf. John 2:22; 20:9), the disciples did not instantly catch the overriding theological significance of the Messianic Entry as this is expressed in Zechariah's prophetic statement (cf. John 12:14-16), until the light of His resurrection glory illuminated and explained His mighty acts in their proper perspective. (Cf. Luke 24:44ff.; John 14:26; 7:39.)

### WHY TWO DONKEYS?

Matthew has been accused of misreading Zechariah's prophecy by seeing two donkeys there, and then of adding another donkey to this scene to make it agree with his misunderstanding of the prophecy. This arises out of the word "and" in the expression: "riding upon a donkey AND upon a colt the foal of a beast of burden." Matthew supposedly mistook the "donkey" and the "colt" for two animals, and against the testimony of the other Evangelists, gratuitously introduced another female donkey into his record to cover up the apparent discrepancy between Jesus' triumphal entry with only one donkey (as recorded by Mark, Luke and John), and Zechariah's prophecy as he understood it.

The critics are correct to point out that "and" does not always serve to link two distinct objects. Gesenius (*Lexicon*, 234) could be cited to show that the Hebrew *vav* ("and") is also used:

(b) to connect nouns, the second of which depends upon the first as though in the genitive (hendiadys) . . . (c) inserted by way of explanation between words in apposition. . . . Sometimes two nouns are joined together by *vav*, the former of which denotes genus, the latter species, or at least the latter is also contained in the former, so that one might say, *and specially*, and particularly, and namely.

Thus, our sentence would read: "Meek and riding upon an ass, and specifically upon an ass colt, the male foal of she-asses" (Zechariah in Hebrew).

As might be expected of Greek-speaking Jews, the LXX and NT Greek reflect the same usage. Arndt-Gingrich (393) note that *kai* ("and") is often "explicative; i.e. a word or clause is connected by means of *kai* with another word or clause, for the purpose of explaining what goes before it . . . *that is, namely, and indeed, and at that.*" Thus our sentence would read: "Gentle and mounted upon a beast

of burden, that is, upon a young colt," (Zechariah in LXX) or "Gentle and mounted upon an ass, and upon a colt at that, the foal of a beast of burden" (Matthew).

Thus, the ancient prophet intended to point out a fact as surprisingly noteworthy, because it stood in striking contrast to the usual style of all other world conquerors. Filled with incredulous wonder, Zechariah exclaimed: "Note, your king is coming to you: humble and mounted on an ass, and on a colt at that, the foal of asses!"

But Matthew is Hebrew enough to recognize idioms in his own language better than his distant critics. In fact, while the above argumentation is valid, it is the critics who fail to see the TWO ASSES IN ZECHARIAH! Any careful reading of Zechariah in Hebrew will show that there really are two asses: the male ass (*chamor*) on which the King was to ride, and the female ass (*athon*), mother of the former. Nothing is said in Zechariah about the King's riding upon both animals. All that is affirmed is that he will ride upon the male ass-colt.

It appears, therefore, that our Lord requested that both animals be brought in order better to emphasize His intention to fulfil Zechariah's prophecy. Thus, that unmounted she-ass in the Messianic Procession was not extra at all. Because she came along beside her colt mounted by Jesus, her otherwise unexplained presence draws attention to the fact that the colt ridden by Zion's King is truly a "colt, the foal of she-asses." By re-enacting everything in Zechariah's prophecy down to the fine detail of including the seemingly unnecessary she-ass in the picture, Jesus intended to focus public attention on the prophecy. And yet everything took place so naturally that the disciples did not immediately see the connection between Jesus' actions and the prophecy. This came upon later reflection, but Jesus had laid the groundwork for their understanding (cf. John 12:16).

Why, then, did Matthew report two donkeys, when his colleagues report only one? Matthew objectively counted both of them, because there were two to be counted! The other Evangelists characteristically singled out the donkey most important for their report, i.e. the one Jesus actually rode, without mentioning the colt's dam or denying her presence in the parade that day. The former publican can hardly be criticized for his continued careful attention to numbers, even after his call to Apostleship! (Other examples of this procedure: two demoniacs, Matt. 8:28 = Mark 5:2 = Luke 8:27; two blind men, Matt. 20:30 = Mark 10:46 = Luke 18:35.) In fact, Mark and Luke do not quote Zechariah's prophecy and John shortens it, leaving

out Zechariah's mention of the colt's mother, so they would not need to mention two animals.

21:6 **And the disciples went, and did even as Jesus appointed them,** because "they found it as he had told them" (Luke 19:32) **7 and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their garments; and he sat thereon.** Although Jesus could really ride only one animal, nevertheless, because the Lord had not yet indicated which He intended to mount, the men prepared both for the procession. However, it does not follow that Jesus mounted both the colt AND the older donkey, as some commentators attempt to force Matthew to say. Because He wrote: "they brought the ass and the colt and put their clothes on them and he sat on them (*kaì epéthekan ep 'autôn tà himàtia, kaì epekàthisen epàno autôn*), it is thought that the plural *autôn* ("them") refers to "donkeys" in both cases. The last *autôn*, however, refers to the near antecedent, i.e. the *garments* placed upon the donkeys. The pronoun's antecedent is normally the noun which is mentioned closest in the near context, unless other reasons prevail. In our case, the other interpretation would create the absurdity of seeing Jesus try to sit astraddle of two donkeys contemporaneously.

*Their garments* were the long, outer robe that served the purpose of overcoat. (See note on 5:40; cf. Exod. 22:26f.) Since the unbroken colt would not be saddled, Jesus' men, instantly and without a thought for self, whipped off their own robes—the best that they had for Passover—to create a makeshift saddle blanket for Him. *He sat thereon*: Luke mentions how the disciples assisted Jesus in seating Himself comfortably on His mount.

Plummer (*Matthew*, 286) is mistaken to write: "There seems to be no example of *epàno* being used as riding on an animal; it would perhaps be as unusual as for us to talk of riding 'on the top of' a horse." While he may be correct with regard to "riding" as such, Matthew did not say, "he rode thereon," but "he SAT thereon" (*kaì epekàthisen epàno autôn*). And THIS idiom is well documented (Matt. 23:22; 28:2; Rev. 6:8; cf. other passages where there is implied a similar contact between one object and another placed on top of it: Matt. 5:14; 23:18, 20; Rev. 20:3). Plummer simply failed to see that the procession had not yet started and that Jesus had merely mounted the donkey.

How long it took the disciples to go and return with the animals is not stated. However, we must not imagine the Royal Entry into

Jerusalem as occurring in one morning's time, because Mark informs us that when Jesus finally arrived in the temple, "it was already late" (Mark 11:11). Further, John's account (12:12f.) implies enough time on this day for a great crowd in Jerusalem to hear of Jesus' coming and to go to meet Him as He arrived over Olivet's brow.

**21:8 And the most part of the multitude:** where did all these people come from? The Synoptics are surprisingly brief here, since suddenly, almost miraculously out of nowhere, people not only begin milling around Jesus and shouting Messianic slogans, but launch a demonstration so portentous that not only are the jealous Pharisees deeply shaken (John 12:19) and impotent to stop it (Luke 19:37-40), but also the entire city of Jerusalem is eventually stirred (Matt. 21:10). It is John (12:12f., 17f.) who provides the explanations:

1. The multitude consisted of pilgrims "who had come to the feast" (John 12:12). They are already people "on the move" in Jerusalem, hence relatively free to flow to points of interest. These "heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem," (John 12:12b). How they heard is not stated, although it is not impossible that Jesus had already announced His intention to make such an entry into the city on Sunday morning. These rumors must have been spread through the Capital by excited Galilean pilgrims who had travelled with the Lord and had gone on into the city earlier.
2. Even some Jerusalemites who had been present in Bethany's cemetery to console Martha and Mary concerning their brother Lazarus (cf. John 11:18f., 31, 45f.), bore witness to Jesus, because they had witnessed Lazarus' resurrection (John 12:17f.). This too swelled the crowd now standing to meet Jesus.

The fact that the Synoptics omit this rich information may indicate that the Triumphal Entry had become a fact so well-known by the time of its documentation, that no explanation of the crowds' presence was thought essential to communicate the basic story. So we must picture a convergence of two streams of people on the Mount of Olives, the larger one approaching from Jerusalem, the other flowing along beside Jesus coming from Bethany. Some estimate of the magnitude of this demonstration may be had by remembering the census taken when Cestius was governor during the time of Nero, at which time it was learned that more than two and a half million Jews were present at that later Passover (Josephus, *Wars*, VI,9,3). If we arbitrarily deduct from the population of Jerusalem and reduce

the remainder by three-fourths, the remaining throng of people ready to acclaim Jesus is no small crowd! But it was *the multitudes*, not the authorities in Israel, who joined in this happy occasion. Only the common people praised Jesus, a rather common occurrence throughout Jesus' ministry. (Cf. Mark 11:18; 12:37; Luke 18:43; 19:48; 21:38; 8:40; 13:17.) Just a few, omnipresent, grouchy Pharisees stood around criticizing. Remarkable for their conspicuous absence are the political heads, the religious hierarchy and the military. This is the day of the lower, middle class and the poor, the unarmed, the unlearned, the unappreciated masses.

**The multitude spread their garments on the way**, a gesture to show royal honor to Jesus. (Cf. II Kings 9:13.) In this, they followed the example of the disciples who sacrificed their own outer garment to drape it over the donkeys. Feel the infectious enthusiasm that motivated these generous well-wishers to carpet Jesus' path with their best outer robes worn to the Passover. No waving banners, no battle flags, no velvet carpet: just the homespun cloth of common people. Love is mother of inventive ways of showing this high honor and lowly submission. **Others cut branches from the trees and spread them in the way.** Back in Nehemiah's time (Neh. 8:15), people were ordered to "go out to the hill and bring" such branches as were needed for making the typical booths for the Feast of Tabernacles. Perhaps the trees were considered public domain for precisely this purpose.

Grand processions of this same nature had been organized to greet Alexander the Great (Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI,8,5). But is there any special significance in the choice of palm branches carried by many in the multitude (John 12:13) or that others, finding themselves no more palms, also **cut branches from the trees** (Matthew) to spread their leafy branches on the road ahead of Jesus?

1. A mixture of palm branches and those from leafy trees combined with fruit of goodly trees and willows of the brook was symbolic of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:39-43; cf. Rev. 7:9, 13-17, esp. v. 15 *skênôsei*). Since Matthew does not specify which trees furnished branches, this cannot be conclusive against identification of the idea in the minds of the well-wishers celebrating Jesus' entry.
2. When Judas Maccabeus led Israel in rededicating the Temple (the first Feast of Dedication, cf. John 10:22), they "celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing in the manner of the

feast of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. Therefore bearing ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place." (II Macc. 10:6f. However, this detail is not mentioned in I Macc. 4:36-51.)

3. Simon Maccabeus' cleansing of the Citadel was celebrated with a procession of Jews bearing palm branches and singing as they went (I Macc. 13:50-52).

Can it be that, for the Israelites, these branches represented a symbol of triumph over their enemies? Or are they just part of the usual scenario appropriate for offering homage to a triumphant leader? (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, II,372.) In the light of the above references, is it not likely that the transferring of some of the symbolism of the Feast of Tabernacles is the work, not of our Evangelists, as some assert, but of the people? If the zealous puritans who purified the Temple and Citadel saw nothing inappropriate about Psalm-singing and tree branches as an expression of special joy granted them by God, why should not this Passover crowd greet Jesus in precisely the same way and for the same reasons? Nevertheless, the SPIRIT of the Feast of Booths permeates the present demonstration. Admittedly the people's actions do not indicate a full consciousness of Jesus' Messiahship as His disciples later came to understand this (John 12:14-16), but who can affirm with certainty that these excited people did not desire to proclaim the typical meaning of the Feast of Booths? Hailing Jesus as the Christ (King of Israel and Son of David), it is not impossible nor unlikely that these crowds, in their longing for the permanent restoration of all things, should have desired to express themselves in terms of the Feast of Booths. This is not contradicted by the fact that it was Passover, because, if they hoped that the Messiah would bring in a new era, entirely different from all that went before, Passover could be forgotten, lost in the permanent joy of eternal peace!

Nevertheless, the more certainly it can be determined that the multitudes intended to communicate something of the Tabernacles festal spirit, the more wrong-headed they appear. In fact, they would have confused the Messiah's first coming for His second, the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb for the joyous feast of booths at year's end, the cross for the eternal kingdom.

If the Tabernacles flavor should be thought important for our understanding of Matthew, why did not Matthew make it explicit as he writes for Jews?

1. By referring to what Zechariah had written concerning the Messiah, he spoke of it indirectly. (Cf. Zech. 14:16-19.)
2. By simply narrating the event objectively, Matthew spoke volumes to any Jew who, sensitive to the history of his people and to his own experience of worship at the great feasts, would recognize, in the facts narrated, the high symbolism intended by the crowds.

21:9 **And the multitudes that went before him, and that followed** . . . are definitely two groups. The former (*hoi dè òchloi hoi proàgontes autòn*) are probably those whom John mentions as coming from Jerusalem to meet Jesus (John 12:12f.). Turning as they meet Him coming over the hill, they become the vanguard moving at the front of the procession. Luke (19:37f.) connects this dramatic moment with Jesus' arrival at the summit of the Mount of Olives where the descent begins. At precisely this moment "the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen." (See Paraphrase/Harmony.) A futile attempt by some Pharisees to silence this popular enthusiasm is itself squelched by Jesus' famous rebuttal: "If these were silent, the very stones would cry out!" (Luke 19:40). It may well have been in this very connection that frustrated colleagues of those who remonstrated with Jesus, now dissuade them from further, useless attempts: "You see that you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him" (John 12:19). This bitter Pharisean confession, while admittedly exaggerated, provides some estimate of the magnitude of this mass rally. Certainly, THEIR world had gone after Him, since the Pharisees normally had the common people in the palm of their hand (*Antiquities*, XIII,10,5,6). But now these are mobilizing around these bigots' latest, most serious Rival.

But Jesus' thoughts were disturbed by something other than His supposedly universal popularity indicated in the frustrated Pharisees' unintended praise (Luke 19:41-44). When, at a bend in the road or after crossing a last ridge of the mountain, Jerusalem came into full view, Jesus no longer heard the happy shouting, no longer saw the masses milling around Him. He could only weep as He clearly fore-saw the final tragic end of what had been so dear to Him, the city

of the Great King, its inhabitants and its Temple. He wept, because neither Israel nor Jerusalem had recognized Who it was that had visited them. Not only was earth now a "visited planet," but God Himself, in the person of His Son, had now visited His nation, His city and would soon visit His house, the Temple, for the last time before its final fall. He was the only person that day who understood the real issues, and His sobs, seemingly so out of place amidst the well-nigh universal rejoicing around Him, proved far more realistic than did the hosannas. He understood what His coming could have granted to the nation, but this did not blind Him to the real punishment hanging over the people who turned a deaf ear to His offers.

**Hosanna to the Son of David.** The word *Hosanna* is the Greek form of the Hebrew expression *Hoshiah nah*, which originally indicated a liturgical appeal to God: "Help" or "Save, I pray." This crowd seems to be using it more loosely, in the sense of "Give victory to the Son of David!" (Cf. "God save the King!" Ps. 20:9 = LXX 19:10; see Gesenius, 374.) Although *Hosanna* originally meant "O save!" the fulness of salvation is life unbroken by death. Consequently, *Hosanna* became equivalent to "Live for ever!" It was an easy step to broaden its restricted usage to express hearty best wishes, a sort of holy hurray, mingling approval, admiration and highest good feelings toward the person thus addressed. Nevertheless, the extent to which those Hebrews' shout appealed to the Nazarene for the nation's salvation is the extent to which Jesus' enemies must have been infuriated. To hear the Nazarene claimant to Messiahship so addressed constituted a far more serious scandal in the leaders' thinking than merely to shout a comparatively harmless and complimentary Psalm of praise to welcome Him into Jerusalem. Who is HE to be able to "save" Israel?! Did the crowds have in mind the Messianic Psalm 118? To a Hebrew ear, there is practically no difference between Matthew 21:9b, c and the first lines of Psalm 118:25, 26, with the single addition of "to the Son of David," which is a perfectly natural paraphrase for "Messiah."

How the other Evangelists inflect this basic quotation is also instructive. Whereas Mark, Luke and John unitedly cite "Blessed (be) He who comes in the name of the Lord," rather than explain the Jewish expression "Son of David" (Messianic King), they spell it out: "even the King of Israel" (John 12:13), "the coming kingdom of our father, David," (Mark 11:10) or simply "the king" (Luke 19:39). On *Son of David*, see notes on 1:1, 20; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30.

**He who comes in the name of the Lord**, in Psalm 118:26 could refer to ANY worshipper of God arriving at Jerusalem. In fact, Edersheim (*Life*, II,368) notes that, according to Jewish tradition, Psalm 118:25-28 was commonly chanted antiphonally by the people of Jerusalem as they went to welcome the arriving pilgrims (Midrash Tehilim on Psalm 118; cf. Flusser, *Jesus*, 150). But how much more applicable is this expression to the Anointed of God who comes! Significantly, the following line from Psalm 118:26 affirms: "We bless you from the house of the Lord." Shortly thereafter the Lord suddenly came to His temple (cf. Mal. 3:1). As will be noted later, Psalm 118:22f. is to be understood in a Messianic sense. (Cf. Matt. 21:42 = Mark 12:10 = Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11f.; I Peter 2:7.)

**Hosanna in the highest!** If "hosanna" means "give victory" (cf. Rev. 7:9f.), then they may be praying God's blessing on Jesus, seeking for Him the highest possible victory, not merely God's help to win over earthly enemies, but the conquest of the principalities and powers throughout the universe. (Cf. Ps. 148:1c.) Luke (19:38b) paraphrases this lovely prayer: "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Cf. Luke 2:14.) May Messiah's reign over the universe bring peace and glory!

How is it that so many people could rise so spontaneously and so ecstatically to this occasion?

1. This was the Passover season with its commemoration of the redemption of Israel from the slavery of Egypt. The Egyptian bondage would remind them of the Roman occupation. This, in turn, would call for prayer for liberation from this latest bondage. Although the crowds would assume that liberation from Rome must come through military might, their very deliverance from Egypt was an act of totally divine omnipotence, unaided by human intervention. God could do it again!
2. The worship of the pilgrims approaching Jerusalem was begun as they neared the city, chanting Psalms, and their celebration of God's redemptive power continued as they sang Psalms 113-118 during the feast. Since the Hebrew people knew the words of this great poetry by heart and were accustomed to singing it together, it is no more amazing that they should break forth in well-known songs of praise than for a group of Christians to use some well-known Christian hymn to proclaim their praise. The surprise of this scenario does not consist in singing what they already knew, but in directing this praise to Jesus.

3. Jesus' multitude of disciples had well-founded reason to rejoice and praise God "for all the mighty works that they had seen" (Luke 19:37), because these miracles evidenced the presence of One in their midst who could bring their long-cherished hopes to reality. Further, the stupendous miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead had stirred the admiration of almost everyone who learned of "this sign" of Jesus' power and identity (John 12:17f.).
4. Psychologically, who could NOT rejoice that God's redemption of His people, so long-awaited, is about to take place in one's own generation?
  - a. In fact, if Jesus IS the Messiah they think He is going to be, God's great, eternal Feast of Booths is about to begin. (See note on 21:8.)
  - b. The crowds' emphasis on the Davidic Kingdom (Mark 11:10; Luke 19:38; John 12:13) accurately summarizes the popular impression "that the Kingdom of God was shortly to appear" (Luke 19:11).
  - c. Since they had endured poverty and enslavement for centuries and sustained the waiting for their Messiah to bring them unparalleled prosperity, no wonder their enthusiasm exploded in jubilant singing, when they believed that their economic woes were now to be over! National independence was within reach! It was an extraordinary, unforgettable moment in Israel's history: a day-long, palm-branch-wrapped outpouring of national pride, patriotism and joy—millions of fellow Hebrews feeling together, laughing together, praying together, crying and rejoicing together.
5. McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 575) notes that the Messianic cheering began largely with the crowd coming out from Jerusalem to meet Jesus. Therefore, "the apostles who were approaching the city with Jesus had nothing to do with inciting this praise." And yet, while they may not have initiated it, they could very well have coordinated and continued it. After all, their own views of Jesus' mission were almost perfect copies of the popular views.
6. People recognized in Jesus a regal glory greater than all else on earth:
  - a. They remembered His supernatural power superior to all that the great of earth could ever possess.
  - b. They recalled His undoubtedly prophetic teaching "as one who possesses authority, not like the scribes."
  - c. They were in love with His matchless character so much like God.

- d. They had begun to appreciate Him as the promised Christ, the fulfiller of their Bible's prophecies.
  - e. By faith they had caught a glimpse of the foundational reality which this event portrayed. The fact that our Lord welcomed their unabashed adoration merely served to stabilize and fortify their confidence in Him and belief in that reality.
7. The people more closely associated with Jesus are completely open to a "triumphal entry." It seemed that the hour for the manifestation of His royalty, so long desired by His mother (John 2:4), demanded by His brothers (John 7:4) and dreamed of by His followers (Matt. 20:21; Luke 19:11; cf. Acts 1:6), was about to strike. All that was lacking to release their restrained impatience and free their enthusiasm was a signal from Jesus. In fact, all their present exhilaration now completely justified His earlier Messianic reserve. (See notes on 16:20; 14:22; 17:9.)

If so many reasons seem excessive to explain the crowd's enthusiasm, let it be remembered that it is with a CROWD that we are dealing, a vast concourse of milling, wondering single individuals with quite varied reasons for what each does. None of those present were motivated by just one reason. Many were undoubtedly stirred by conflicting reasons. Yet, for the most part, they thought they were really praising God by welcoming Jesus in this way (Luke 19:37). This explains why Jesus could accept their unashamed praise and identify with their enthusiasm, however poorly they truly understood Him and His mission. He accepted their holy enthusiasm and spiritual joy.

Lest the majority of these well-wishers be maligned by picturing them as readily swaying one day from high Messianic fervor toward Jesus, to bitter, determined opposition to Him on another,—one day singing "Hosanna," another day angrily bawling, "Crucify Him!"—let us recall several facts:

- 1. John 12:12f., 17f. clearly identifies this crowd as made up largely of disciples and sympathizers friendly to Jesus.
- 2. Even the Pharisees on location credit the multitude with being largely composed of "your disciples" (Luke 19:39).
- 3. Matthew seems to trace a contrast between "Jerusalem" and "the crowds" (Matt. 21:10f.).
- 4. The rulers could not count on popular support for their assassination of Jesus, and the blow must necessarily be dealt "by stealth . . . not during the feast lest there be a tumult among the people"

(Matt. 26:3-5 and par.). The presence of Jesus' supporters among pilgrims at the feast posed a serious hindrance to the authorities' freedom to act (cf. Matt. 21:26; Mark 12:12).

5. Although Peter, addressing a mixed audience of pilgrims and local citizenry, accuses them all generally (Acts 2:14, 23, 36; 3:14, 17), it is significant that Paul, when addressing Hebrews of the Diaspora, specifically accuses the dwellers of Jerusalem and their rulers (Acts 13:26f.). The difference is that Peter was addressing more directly the murderers mixed among the various listeners, while Paul was singling out those materially responsible for Christ's murder. Cleopas makes this same distinction (Luke 24:19f.).
6. Edersheim (*Life*, II,371) also distinguishes the leaders and people:

The very suddenness and completeness of the blow, which the Jewish authorities delivered, would have stunned even those who had deeper knowledge, more cohesion and greater independence than most of them who, on that Palm-Sunday, had gone forth from the City.

Thus, the majority of people did not sway from "Hosanna" to "Crucify Him!" Rather, they lamented Jesus' fate (Luke 24:19f.). This, of course, is not to say that absolutely no one wavered. In fact, if anyone swayed from unmitigated admiration of Jesus to bitter resentment and readiness to crucify Him, it would be because Jesus had disappointed him by not bringing in the expected Kingdom. (Remember 11:2-6. Judas Iscariot may be a sad case in point.) Wrong expectations concerning Jesus' Messianic program could not help but set people up for a letdown. If they hoped He would instantly set up the Kingdom and rule from Jerusalem on David's throne, realize national ambitions of glory and independence, then this very expectation, when disappointed, psychologically prepared them to turn against Jesus when they saw Him the apparently helpless prisoner of the very Romans He should have been most ruthlessly ready to eliminate. Shaken by His steadfast refusal to use His power to defend Himself and their cause, dazed at His continuing to promote purely ethical ends, stunned by the consequences of being found on the losing side when Jesus permitted Himself to be beaten by the hierarchy, those who were fundamentally undecided earlier could easily swing over to the opposition. But even then, it is to be doubted how many would be so ready to sell out to His enemies when there was hope Jesus might yet act, that is, until Thursday night of the Passover week.

Even so, how many of those who shouted "Hosanna" were even physically present when, early Friday morning, Pilate presented Jesus to a crowd of people for a final decision (Luke 23:4, 13; Matt. 27:20-25)? Since these were specially primed and prompted to request Barabbas and destroy Jesus, is it even likely that His enemies would have permitted into the judgment area anyone who could raise a dissenting voice at the critical moment in the hearing of Pilate on whose final decision everything depended? No, it appears that the multitude favorable to Jesus succeeded in gathering only after His condemnation. (See Luke 23:27, 35, 48f.)

The point is that we are discussing the separate motives of approximately two and a half million people, some of whom are bitterly jealous of Jesus, others who are ardently admirers but not decidedly disciples, others who are curiosity seekers, others who are profoundly committed to Him, others who are nervously plotting His assassination, others who are "going along for the ride." So, why not let the majority of the Triumphal Entry crowd be thought of as sincere and steadfast to the end of Jesus' crucifixion?

**21:10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred.** The cheering could have been heard in the city while the procession was yet beginning the descent of Olivet, causing the inhabitants of Jerusalem to turn their gaze toward that mount 70 meters higher than the temple area. Although Jesus was not unknown in Jerusalem (cf. John 2:13-24; 5:1-47; 7-10:39), no Jerusalemite could have dreamed that He would dare stage a Messianic demonstration on this scale, entering the city accompanied by a throng shouting Messianic slogans.

While the expression, *all the city*, may refer not only to the city's usual population but also to the tens of thousands of Passover pilgrims arrived from all over the Roman Empire (cf. the representative samples present on Pentecost just 50 days later: Acts 2:5-11), it is evident from Matthew's antithesis cast between "all the city" (here) and "the crowds" (v. 11), that there is a contrast between the Jerusalemites and the pilgrims. The local citizens evidenced a certain coldness to Jesus. After all Jesus had done in Palestine, after all the "wanted notices" had been circulating (John 11:57), if they still had to ask "*Who is this?*" rather than "What is going on?" they were insensitive to Jesus!

While scholars have pointed out the specific interest of Luke in Jerusalem as the City of God that rejected the Son of God, this

emphasis, somewhat less evident, is present in Matthew also. Whereas *all the city was stirred* to ask, *Who is this?* it was untroubled to seek the proper answer to its own question and act on it. It was satisfied to take the lowest possible view of the common evaluation (v. 11). Even as at Jesus' birth (Matt. 2:3), when Jerusalem was shaken (*etaràchthe*) by the disturbing questions of the Magi, so also now she is shaken (*eseìsthe*) by the new reality emphasized by the shouting crowds. But in neither case is there any evidence that Jerusalem took the trouble to examine more than superficially the momentous significance of the events that caused the foreigner tourists within her gates to sing so joyfully.

*Who is this?* is not so much a question for information (cf. John 9:36) as it is a challenge, half-alarmed and half-contemptuous. Matthew's choice to report this question may have several ramifications:

1. Jesus is not walking into just any city in the world. He has now *come into Jerusalem*. This city was not merely the center of religious and political life in Israel. Rather, it symbolized the sense of Israel's history and importance in the scheme of God. (Study Zechariah's references to Jerusalem in their context: 1:12, 14, 16, 17; 2:2, 4, 12; 3:2; 8:4, 8, 22; 9:9, 10; 12:2-11; 13:1; 14:2, 4, 8, 10-12, 14, 16f., 21. Note also his references to "Zion, House of God, Temple.") How will Jerusalem react to Him? is a question on the mind of Jewish readers. As with "the Jews," in John's language, so Jerusalem too became a symbol of the opposition to Jesus. (Cf. 23:37ff.).
2. For a Hebrew, "to go up to Jerusalem" had a religious meaning, but, for Jesus, it is much more. He is going up there in the name of God to take possession of all that finds its fulfillment in Him. Because He had come to be sacrificed for the world's sins, He did it in the most public way appropriate: He came in His nation's capital at the most significant feast of the year to die as God's Passover Lamb while the nation was assembled to witness it.
3. Thus, Matthew's choice to record this one succinct question inexorably guides the reader. It is as if he were asking: "Dear reader, even as the city asked, so now you too must answer on the basis of all you have seen of this Man: *who is this?*"

21:11 **And the multitudes said, This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.** There can be no surprise that ignorant people should provide such a grossly limited evaluation of our Lord, i.e. was

He no more to them than merely *the prophet*?! Our surprise arises, rather, from the fact that Matthew himself just leaves this answer uncorrected on the lips of the crowds. Is not Jesus so much more?! But, argues Matthew, let men ponder the glorious truth that, after 400 years of Heaven's silence in which no true prophet ever arose in Israel, God has finally sent to His people, not only John the Baptist, but *THE Prophet* (*ho profètes*).

Cf. Mark 6:15; Luke 7:16; 24:19; John 1:21, 25; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17. Although John 1:21, 25 indicates confusion among some Jews about identifying "the Christ" with "the Prophet," since it is evident that some did not consider them as perfectly synonymous, nevertheless John 6:14 and 7:40 indicate that others saw these as more nearly synonymous terms.

It was the Galileans who first identified Jesus as "the Prophet who is to come into the world!" (John 6:14; cf. Luke 7:16). Others too—even Samaritans—had been willing to acknowledge His prophetic office. (Cf. Matt. 16:14; Luke 9:8, 19; John 4:19; 7:4; 9:17.) Even after this, this same popular view protected Jesus (Matt. 21:46). Both Peter (Acts 3:22f.) and Stephen (Acts 7:37) considered the famous "prophet" prediction of Moses (Deut. 18:15ff.) to have real, persuasive power in identifying Jesus as the promised *prophet*. Thus, Matthew has good reason to draw attention to the fact that this *Prophet* holds sway over men, not by the threat of His sceptre, but through the divine power and authority of His teaching. Let the reader examine the Nazarene's credentials to see whether He be a Teacher come from God or not. If so, let him hear Him and submit to Him! If not, He deserved to be crucified!

As an answer to the monumentally dumb question, "Who is this?" the name *Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee*, bears the ring of Galilean pride as His compatriots name His hometown. Nevertheless, we must not forget the scandal of a Nazarene Christ. He is but a mere provincial, whose despised background was cause for raised eyebrows and harsh words in the Council (John 7:45-52). But, best of all, this lowly background was subject of ancient prophecies! (See notes on 2:23 and 4:12-17.)

While their confession of *Jesus (as) the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee* is undoubtedly the understatement of the century, because HE is so far much more than this, still it must be interpreted in the larger context of the same crowd's Messianic salutations expressed during

the procession. Must we not admit that Peter's Pentecostal accusations, that Israel had murdered God's Christ, had far more clout with his audience, precisely because of this earlier public recognition of Jesus as God's *Prophet*? (See Acts 2:22f., 36; 3:13f.) Certainly, there were some fickle people in this host, who, caught up in the excitement, took up a half-believed cry as their impulse led. But Matthew remembers that those who called Jesus *the prophet*, had also called Him "Son of David . . . He who comes in the name of the Lord!" (v. 9).

### THE POINT OF THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

The point of the Triumphal Entry pageant must be judged, as any other triumph, on the basis of its component parts, its protagonists, its goals.

### WHAT THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY IS NOT

Jesus was not Himself caught up in the popular enthusiasm for His Messiahship. Not even momentarily was He deceived into thinking that people would welcome Him as Messiah totally on His own terms. His weeping over Jerusalem in the midst of the shouting crowds (Luke 19:41ff.) can have no other significance than His unrelenting dedication to the purpose of God, even if it cost Him the loss of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple and the exile of the majority of His kinsmen. Although some would view His weeping as evidence of human weakness, we must see His tears as underlining His sober realism in the presence of facts that broke the heart of God.

Gentiles, had they witnessed this provincial procession characterized by the lusty, honest celebration of common people, would never have dignified it with the title of "triumph." Rather, they would have smiled at any reference to this event in terms of the ambitious displays of victory and glory which the powerful of this world enjoy after their successful aggressions. Notable for its absence was a display of the wealth of conquered kingdoms. Nothing was spent to guarantee the success of this "triumph." Nor were there costly banners or military flags waving in His honor. No marching armies, no blaring trumpets, no rolling drums. But for the popular acclaim there is hardly anything in this parade to justify calling it anything but a Sunday morning outing! The chief Participant Himself rode a borrowed animal hastily

accoutered with borrowed garments. The parade route was strewn, not with rare flowers, but with country greenery hastily stripped from nearby trees. Nor were supporters hired to stage "spontaneous" demonstrations or to incite artificially canned expressions of fanatic enthusiasm for Jesus. Absent were the wealthy, the erudite and the politically powerful. How could this country-festival atmosphere be confused for a proper imperial "triumph"?

Nor was Jesus temporarily accommodating Himself to His excited disciples' expectations and the multitude's mistaken hopes for a materialistic kingdom, as if He felt He must abandon His divine program to condescend for a moment to the level of those who misinterpreted Him. Even though His enemies would attempt to expose Him as an enemy of Rome, as a Zealot's political messiah, His Messianic Entry into Jerusalem had an entirely different flavor. In fact, Mark's final word about Jesus' entrance into the temple leaves the impression he is presenting a poor, Galilean provincial wandering around the great temple like any out-of-town tourist, gazing upon its stupendous construction (Mark 11:11).

No, if a triumph intends to celebrate the accomplishments of the conqueror, this was no "triumph" in the usual sense, because, for Jesus, the greatest battle was yet to be fought and won at the cross and through His victories through the Church. (Cf. Rev. 1:5, 6; 5:9, 10.) This Kingdom was to come about by the shedding of blood, not of its enemies, but of its King!

## THE REAL MEANING OF THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

### I. THE IMMEDIATE PURPOSE:

#### PHASE I OF THE "MESSIANIC OFFENSIVE"

A. Jesus entered Jerusalem, the City of the Great King, because He was its true King. Although He did not deny His royal dignity, the insignias of this position are reduced to the minimum absolutely indispensable to display His undeniable royalty as Son of David. Although some royalty is shown in this procession, there is also royal irony intended by Jesus whose entire demeanor fairly shouts: "My kingdom is NOT of this world!" The Messiah's irony may be summarized as follows: (*P.H.C.*, XXII, 487).

1. The superhuman under the garb of the human
2. The majestic under the garb of the lowly

3. The eternal under the garb of the incidental and temporal
4. Unquestionable truth enunciated by an erring crowd

Pharisee, disciple and well-wisher alike failed to understand the high irony of Jesus' choice of the lowly to manifest His highness. It is difficult even for us who are heirs of those disciples to admit how often we fail to appreciate His wisdom. How often our desire for power-plays and pageantry betrays our difference from our Lord and unmasks our failure to understand Him! Paradoxically, however, men would soon forget the pomp of all other great human triumphs of the world conquerors, and yet all common Christians the world over know by heart every detail of this one, most unforgettable moment!

B. Jesus entered Jerusalem to present Himself to the nation as Israel's Messiah. Nevertheless, by doing it in precisely this fashion, He called attention to the full teaching of the inspired prophecies with a view to correcting the popular misconceptions of His mission. He does not refuse openly to declare Himself the awaited Messiah announced by the prophets. But He insists on His own interpretation of how those predictions must be realized, as opposed to the popular expectations. Even as He is saying "yes" to their acclaiming Him their King, He says it in a way that meant "no" to their materialistic ambitions. Consider the curious regality of a "poverty-stricken Messiah"! But His point was well-taken (II Cor. 8:9). This is His true glory.

The era of His "Messianic Reserve" is now over. (See notes on 8:4; 9:30; 13:10-17; 16:20; 17:9.) The truth of His Christhood must now be proclaimed in the most public manner possible. Within His Last Week before the cross there would be no significant opportunity for His materialistic followers to unite and frustrate His planning. Rather it is now time for the most public disclosures of His Messiahship, an announcement of which would occur, in the most formal way possible, in the presence of the Sanhedrin (26:63-66 and par.).

But Jesus did not mean just to declare Himself Messiah in a vacuum. Rather, He offered Himself the spiritual Messiah of Israel, in order to do the kind of teaching before the entire nation during this last week that could have saved His people. This valuable publicity furnished Him the platform from which to make His last, great, personal appeals to get the nation to awaken to the spiritual character of His rule. His goal was to encourage people to embrace Him as Messianic Teacher and Prophet, so they could re-evaluate their ideas of what

the Kingdom must be. So the type of triumphal publicity He sought was not the sort of vain display selfish ambition would choose. Rather, its stark contrast to worldly triumphs underscored the God-sent spiritual character of all He stood for.

Jesus' Christhood must be recognized. Though a hunted man (John 11:57); He courageously permitted Himself to be brought by public procession into Jerusalem accompanied by the explosive enthusiasm of the majority of God's people then living! Such a move was geared to push Israel to a decision about Him and His mission. If men would not admit it, even the rocks would herald His identity (Luke 19:40). Should any doubt whether the crowds intended to attribute Messianic dignity to Jesus, the complaint of the Pharisees is proof against any such doubts, because THEY understood! But the Lord refused to still the crowd's Messianic acclamations, because, however ill-informed the content of their praise, its form expressed the reality. However badly mistaken their grasp of His true mission and identity, He encouraged their adoration and approved it (Luke 19:40), because this loving adoration offered to Him is the basis of all Christian service, sacrifice and suffering. Jesus succeeded in making His point with the majority of the crowd, for, however, feeble their faith, they believed something TRUE about Him. Later they would be in a better position to grasp what it means to confess Jesus as Messiah. But people who hold Him for nothing more than a gentle, however quite human, rabbi, will always be shocked at the "exaggerations and fanaticism" of those who adore Him as Lord and King.

C. Jesus' royal entry into Jerusalem is intended to force the Sanhedrin to act in harmony with God's schedule, rather than their own. The Council intended to slay Jesus "not during the feast, lest there be a tumult among the people" (Matt. 26:5 = Mark 14:2. However does this represent previous thinking of the same men?) By deliberately arousing public sentiment in His Messianic Entry into Jerusalem, He shows the authorities with what kind of threat they must deal decisively and soon. Consider the audacity of this demonstration executed by a wanted man! (John 11:57). The Pharisees, who protested to Jesus to hold back the tidal wave of disciples, not unlikely nodded darkly toward the Tower of Antonia where the Roman garrison was stationed, ready to strike at the barest whisper of revolt. Already bloody uprisings had been brutally quelled with speed and ferocity. Nor was it unlikely that even at that moment an uneasy silence reigned in the Tower as hundreds of Roman eyes were scrutinizing the unauthorized

demonstration growing in excitement and edging ever closer to the City from Olivet.

D. By moving deliberately into Jerusalem in this fashion, Jesus indicated His intention to give His life voluntarily. By personally staging a demonstration calculated to push Jerusalem's leaders to the point of decision and, given their hostility to God and truth, He made His own death a certainty. Further, by taking the initiative, He enjoyed the advantage of remaining in control of the events. He was never a helpless pawn or the unwilling victim of a bad situation, trapped by forces beyond His control. Foster (*Final Week*, 34f.) shows how the royal entry into Jerusalem furnished a dramatic prelude that would draw Israel's attention to the facts which would form the essence of the Gospel:

Jesus was deliberately coming up to Jerusalem to give His life as a ransom for the sins of mankind; it was God's will that the sacrifice should be made in such a public manner that the attention of the world and of the ages should be concentrated upon it. He was not to be assassinated in a dark street or done to death in secret. The proof of the resurrection was to be made incontestable by the fact that the attention of the nation was to be concentrated upon the crucifixion. The triumphal entry threw down the gauntlet to the wicked leaders of the nation in such fashion that they not only brought about His death, but that they turned the nation upside down in the effort to disprove the fact of the resurrection and silence or destroy the people who proclaimed it. Thus, the historic facts which are the foundation of the Christian gospel were tested in the most severe and terrible manner which the devil could invent at the very outset. Thus those in succeeding centuries, who, not having seen were yet to be asked to believe, should have the most complete and unshakeable basis for their faith.

## II. THE LONG-RANGE GOAL

By His fulfilment of the former part of Zechariah's prophecy ("Your King is coming to you in poverty on an ass"), He encourages us all to expect with watching and prayer, obedience and work, the fulfilment of the final portion of that prophet's words: "His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River even to the ends of the earth."

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. When did the "Triumphal Entry" occur? Cite all the Scriptures and facts that combine to indicate the day and time.
2. Describe the route the procession took, beginning from the moment Jesus started giving instructions on the basis of which the procession would begin. Where was Jesus as He gave these instructions? To what village must the two disciples go to find the donkeys? In what general area were these places? Could Jesus and the Twelve see Jerusalem before the procession? If so, how? If not, why not? At what point did they see Jerusalem? Who says so?
3. Where did all the people come from who swelled the crowd of disciples? What motivated them to come to meet Jesus and cheer Him into Jerusalem? There may have been more than one motive.
4. Reconcile the account of Matthew with that of Mark, Luke and John who all affirm that Jesus rode upon a colt, whereas Matthew is equally certain Jesus asked for TWO animals.
5. Locate the prophetic allusions cited by Matthew regarding the Messianic entry into Jerusalem. Explain the significance of such citations here.
6. State the exact instructions Jesus gave the two disciples for finding the necessary animals, then tell what they actually experienced as they obeyed Him.
7. Since Matthew asserts that the disciples threw their robes upon both animals, what are we to understand about the expression, "and He sat thereon": the two donkeys or the robes? Which animal did He ride?
8. Describe the "red-carpet treatment" people gave Jesus as He rode along. Where did the folks get the carpet?
9. Explain the meaning of the phrases or words used in each of the popular shouts and explain where the people got them:
  - a. "Hosanna!"
  - b. "Son of David"
  - c. "He that cometh"
  - d. "In the highest"
10. Describe the reaction of the Pharisees in the crowd (as told by Luke and John). What was Jesus' rebuttal? What were these Pharisees doing in the crowd anyway? Are they Jesus' disciples too?
11. According to Luke, what was Jesus' reaction upon seeing the Holy City? What prophetic words did He pronounce in reference to Jerusalem?

12. What reaction did Jesus provoke in the city of Jerusalem upon His arrival? How did people respond to those who asked what was going on? What did they mean?
13. After the Messianic entry into Jerusalem's Temple, what did Jesus do next, according to Mark? What time of day was it when the procession was finished?
14. List the separate facts in the incident that indicate that Jesus was not merely yielding to the wrong-headed Messianic enthusiasm of the people, but rather deliberately taking the initiative and proceeding according to His own spiritual program.
15. List the separate, new facts that Mark, Luke and John add to our total information about this event.

## SECTION 55

### JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE A LAST TIME AND RECEIVES WORSHIP OF CHILDREN

(Parallels: Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48)

TEXT: 21:12-17

12 And Jesus entered into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold the doves; 13 and he saith unto them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer: but ye make it a den of robbers.

14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children that were crying in the temple and saying, Hosanna to the son of David; they were moved with indignation, 16 and said unto him, Hearest thou what these are saying?

And Jesus saith unto them, Yea: did ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?

17 And he left them, and went forth out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. In your opinion, why should Jesus have felt it necessary to purify the temple at this historic moment and in this particular way?

- b. Matthew, Mark and Luke record this purification at the end of Jesus' ministry, while John records a similar cleansing at the very beginning (John 2:13-22). Do you think these are separate events, and if so, on what basis do you think so? If not, why not?
- c. If you believe that John and the Synoptics record two separate cleansings, what reason would you assign to Jesus' desire to cleanse the temple both at the beginning and at the end of His ministry? If, as we learn from John, He attended a number of feasts in Jerusalem at which people would be changing money and sacrificing, and the merchants would presumably be needed for the same reasons as before and probably in the same places, is it likely that Jesus could have said or done nothing about their presence every time He came? Or is it simpler to assume that the merchants did not return until His last Passover?
- d. Why were the merchants in the Temple anyway? What was so wrong with what they were doing?
- e. Why should the chief priests and scribes have been so disturbed when Jesus purified the Temple? Should not they have been in agreement with Him that such a purification needed to be done?
- f. In your opinion, does not this rather violent demonstration of the spirit of Jesus compromise and sacrifice the spiritual character of His mission?
- g. In what sense are the miracles Jesus worked after the temple cleansing especially appropriate? Or is there any moral connection between the two events?
- h. Matthew does not cite the entire prophecy, as does Mark: "My house shall be called a house of prayer *for all the nations*" (Mark 11:17). Why do you think Matthew left out this latter part which places a definite emphasis on Gentiles?
- i. To what, specifically, does Jesus apply the words "den of robbers"?
- j. If Jesus objects to men's use of the temple of God as a market, on what basis can He justify His turning it into a HOSPITAL? What, if any, is the difference between what the merchants did to the temple, and what Jesus did to it by healing people there? Is there any principle illustrated here which Jesus had taught earlier what people can do on the sabbath? If so, what is it?
- k. How do you account for the fact that the children shout "Hosanna!" the day AFTER the Messianic Entry into Jerusalem?
- l. Why do you think the scribes and chief priests did not scold the children directly for their shouting Messianic slogans in the temple? Why bother Jesus about it?

- m. In what sense is Jesus' justification of the children's praise a tacit affirmation of His deity?
- n. Why would Jesus leave the city of Jerusalem to go to Bethany to spend the night?
- o. How do you think a sensitive Jewish reader would have understood this event, especially if he lived to see the fall of Jerusalem, the desecration and destruction of the Temple during the first century? Do you think he would have tended to see in Jesus' actions a symbol of the judgment that later came upon that nation, city and temple?
- p. Do you see any connection between this story and using the name of God and the Church to promote financial causes or programs? If so, what connection? If not, why not? Does anything Jesus said or did here touch on the problem of Christian stewardship or financing the Kingdom of God? If so, how, or if not, why not?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus and the disciples arrived in Jerusalem from Bethany. When He entered the court of God's temple, He began to drive out all the merchants and their customers. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of the dove merchants. Nor would He allow anyone to use the temple courts as a shortcut for transporting goods.

As He taught them, He said, "The Bible says, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.' But you have reduced it to a 'den of robbers!'" Now the chief priests and theologians heard all He said, because everyday He taught at the temple. So the blind people and the lame approached Him there, and He healed them. But when the hierarchy and theologians witnessed the wonderful things He did and the children chanting in the temple courts, "Glory to the Son of David!" they were furious and reproached Him, "Can you not hear what these children are saying?"

"Of course," Jesus replied. "And have you perhaps never read, 'Out of the mouth of children and babes in arms, You have procured for yourself perfect praise?'"

At this the chief priests and theologians and leading citizens sought a method to eliminate Him, because they feared Him. Yet they were frustrated, not finding any way to do it, since the vast majority of people was swayed by His teaching. They listened to His words with eager attention.

So when evening came, He left them and went out of the city to Bethany where He spent the night.

## SUMMARY

After spending His first night in the Jerusalem area at Bethany, Jesus crossed the Mount of Olives to the city and cursed the fig tree. Then, upon entering the temple court, He cleared out the money-changers and the merchants of animals as well as their customers, refusing to permit anyone to use the Temple as a shortcut or for anything but worship. His vigorous protests did not hinder, but apparently encouraged needy people to approach Him for healing and the children to praise Him. Incensed, the hierarchy objected to His apparent acceptance of Messianic ascriptions of praise. He parried their protests with Scripture. This only fueled their wrath to the point of desiring His elimination, but their efforts to excogitate a workable scheme ended in failure, since the common people eagerly accepted His teaching. At day's end, Jesus left the people in the temple and Jerusalem to return to Bethany for the night.

## NOTES

### I. RELIGIOUS RACKETEERING

21:12 **And Jesus entered into the temple of God.** For fuller notes on the chronological sequence of these events, see before 21:1: "Matthew's Method." *The temple* consisted of a series of courtyards within courtyards in the innermost of which (the court "of the priests") stood the sanctuary proper (*naòs*). Each successive courtyard was accessible only to designated persons, i.e. Hebrews, women and Gentiles respectively, but all courtyards were considered part of the *temple of God* (*hieròn toù theoù*). The outermost courtyard, into which Jesus would first enter, was the place specified where Gentiles could worship. On the south side of the temple square, this court measured 70 square meters (750 sq. ft.) and was paved with marble (Edersheim, *Temple*, 45). Into this latter enclosure a market had been introduced, according to the Talmud (Jerus, *Chagiga* 78a), by a certain Baba Ben Buta, who "brought 3000 sheep of the flocks of Kedar into the Mount of the House, i.e. into the court of the Gentiles, and so within the consecrated precincts" (*P.H.C.*, XXII, 483). Although not the first to do this, he doubtless did so to meet the needs

of the poor. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, I, 370ff.) His motive was above question, but in caring for the Jewish poor, he trampled on the rights of the poor Gentiles! His Jewish sectarianism blinded his own eyes and that of others to Gentiles' right of access to God, and paved the way for shekel-minded profiteers to seize upon this innovation as an excuse to perpetuate this "right-minded" convenience for all foreign Jews who desired to purchase their sacrifices close at hand.

**Jesus . . . cast out all them that sold.** That this represents a second cleansing of the Temple is seen from the following comparison:

#### FIRST CLEANSING (John 2)

1. Occurred at the first Passover of Jesus' ministry (John 2:13).
2. Animals mentioned particularly: cattle, sheep, doves (John 2:14).
3. Jesus used scourge on animals (John 2:15).
4. Money-changers' tables overturned.
5. Dove-sellers ordered to transport wares out of temple (John 2:16).
6. "Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise" (2:16).
7. Disciples' reaction indicated (John 2:17).
8. Jews challenged Jesus' right (John 2:18).
9. Jesus answered with prophetic sign of resurrection (John 2:19-22).
10. Jesus worked miracles (John 2:23).
11. Disciples believed Scriptures and Jesus (John 2:22).
12. Jesus' prophetic ministry largely yet future and its outcome not yet decided by events.

#### SECOND CLEANSING (Synoptics)

1. Occurred just prior to last Passover of Jesus' life (Matt. 26:2).
2. Only doves specially mentioned (Matt. 21:12).
3. No scourge mentioned.
4. Money-changers' tables overturned.
5. No similar order cited.
6. Quotation of Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:11: "House of prayer now a den of thieves."
7. No disciples' reaction indicated.
8. Chief rulers challenge Jesus' sense of propriety (Matt. 21:16).
9. Jesus answered with Scripture (Ps. 8:2). Prophetic sign not cited but known (Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58).
10. Jesus worked miracles (Matt. 21:14).
11. Children praise Him (Matt. 21:15).
12. The outcome of Jesus' prophetic ministry already decided.

The Synoptics did not record the first cleansing, since they omitted the early Judean ministry completely (cf. John 2:13—4:4). John, conversely, could safely bypass the second purification of the temple, because its message is virtually included in the former and could be omitted, since the Synoptics had already recounted it.

Still, why should a second cleansing be thought necessary?

1. Because Jesus was not so respected in the capital, that one purification would have permanently stamped out the scandalous market. Rather, the power bloc in Jerusalem would have been more than eager to regard with public contempt His pretended right to purify the temple.
2. Because persistent graft would have driven the selfish to reinstate what brought them such profits, repeated show-downs would be unavoidable. Consistency would dictate its cleansing every time the abuse repeated itself. But, had they reinstalled the market in the interval between the first and last Passovers of Jesus' ministry, would He have let them get away with it? He may, rather, have ignored its presence, intending to hit it one more time—hard—this last week in connection with the final crisis.
3. Because those driven out the first time had finally found courage to return. It may have taken two or three years for the hierarchy, whose personal profit was most menaced by the market's removal, to re-establish their pet project within the holy precincts. If they were letting the flames cool which Jesus had ignited at the first cleansing, they perhaps thought it politically expedient to wait a year or so before re-inaugurating the temple bazaar.

**All them that sold in the temple . . . money-changers . . . them that sold doves.** These merchants were needed in Jerusalem to sell sacrificial animals to worshippers who had travelled distances too great to transport their animals with them. Even God Himself had foreseen this need (Deut. 14:24ff.). The money exchange was thought necessary to convert foreign coins, brought in by the pilgrims from outside Palestine, into the "shekel of the sanctuary" for the payment of the temple tax (cf. Exod. 30:13; Matt. 17:24 notes), other free-will offerings and purifications. (Cf. *Shekalim* 1:1-3; Acts 21:24; see *bBerakoth* 47b; *Bekhoroth* 8:7.) Doves, or pigeons, were essential for ritual purifications (cf. John 11:55; Lev. 15:14, 29), but mainly for the sacrifices of the poor (Lev. 5:7, 11; 12:8; 14:22; Luke 2:22-24). These latter were sold in four shops (Jer. Taan. 4:8). Further, sacrificial animals had to be inspected for suitability (Lev. 3:6; 4:3, 23, 28, 32: "without defect"). Even these inspectors could charge a certain amount for their approval (*Bekhor* 4:5). Although Sanhedrin regulations governed the charges that could be made for money exchange and inspection services (see Edersheim, *Temple*, 72), the presence of the Temple market would psychologically lead people to argue, "Better get the right money from authorized changers, than haggle with

unauthorized dealers! If our animal purchase from others elsewhere risks being disqualified on a technicality by temple inspectors, better buy them from the priests themselves, than lose money on unqualified animals!" This thinking leads to a practical monopoly on the entire sacrificial procedure. However, God had not indicated WHERE or FROM WHOM worshippers should purchase things necessary for the feasts (John 13:29).

But if profit-taking from foreign exchange transactions is an old, respected, professional institution, what was their crime? The abuse consisted in the following facts:

1. The market did not need to stand in the very court of the temple where Gentiles were granted the freedom to worship God. Even if no money were involved, the alien peoples were being robbed, not of their wealth, but of their right to worship. The suspicion that this stockyard stood in the larger court is justified by the fact that its noise and dirt would not have been tolerated in the courts nearest the actual sacrificing and worship of the Hebrew men and women. Thoughtfulness on the part of the market's planners should have dictated that the bazaar be located elsewhere, even just outside the temple's walls. But thoughtfulness or consideration of Gentiles' rights was not their strong point. If Caiaphas and company were to protect their monopoly, it had to be kept inside the temple.
2. The unbridled graft of the merchants and money-changers is implied in Jesus' accusation that they had turned God's house into a "den of robbers." Josephus, too, charges Annas, son of Anna, of greed (*Ant. XX, 8,8; 9:2*). Greed had replaced reverence in the temple.

Edersheim (*Life, I, 367ff.*) furnishes the following devastating evidence of this. The markets were called "the Bazaars of the sons of Annas." An aroused, angry population rose and eliminated these bazaars in 67 A.D., decidedly due to the shameful grasping that marked that business (Siphre on Deut. sec. 105; Jer. Peah. 1:6). Profits from the sale of sacrifices were funnelled into the temple treasury for the priests' use. The money changers, too, likely had to buy from leading temple officials their right to pocket a percentage of their profits.

3. Another reason for Jesus' unhesitating hostility to these banking tables is undoubtedly their location, because, for the unwary

visiting Hebrews, the location in the temple communicated an unmistakable aura of sanctity to the services these bankers offered. If they preferred not to deal with unauthorized exchanges elsewhere, they could surely trust these operating within the jurisdiction of God's house. Not subject to competitive tensions of a free market and shielded by the name of God, these moneychangers and animal sellers dishonored God by their monopoly profits.

4. Not only were the merchants at fault, but other thoughtless people, quite unconnected with the market, desecrated the holy place by their noisy passage through its courts as a convenient shortcut to another part of the city (Mark 11:16). This thoughtless disregard for the uniquely sacred purpose for which God ordered the temple built, stole the Gentiles' right to pray unhindered. This made those who did it **THIEVES** in the sight of God whose House it was.

It was into such a temple that the Son of its Owner strode that morning. No wonder **He cast them all out!** Detractors join His original critics to accuse Him of an unworthy outburst of violent anger, indicator of human weakness that vitiates His sinlessness.

1. Far from being a sign of human weakness, this judicial act, expressed Jesus' moral power, in that He vindicated the high honor of God and His House. It would have been a trait of human weakness, had He **NOT** done so! This means that **ANY JEW**, filled with a holy zeal for God, should have cleansed the temple long before now. That the whole nation yielded without a serious objection to the interested connivance of their hierarchy, should forever prove who **REALLY** was compromised by human weakness. (Remember God's blessing on Phinehas! Num. 25:7-13; Ps. 106:30f. And Jesus did not even use a spear!)
2. Rather than exemplify a gross lack of tact or bare iconoclasm, Jesus' attack on crass commercialism in the name of God appealed directly to what ideally was at the heart of every true Hebrew's consciousness of God; respect for the temple of Jahweh. From this point of view, Jesus' proceeding against the abuses is "the most profoundly conservative Jewish act," (Godet citing Beyschlag, *John*, 370) and true Hebrew patriotism.
3. The responsibility for the war rests with those who break the peace. Jesus did not disturb the peace: the guilt for that lay squarely on the shoulders of a corrupt high-priesthood. He simply restored the original peace, because of His merciful, sympathetic concern for people in danger of missing God in that temple.

4. There is here no inconsistency with Jesus' healing the sick in the temple after kicking out the merchants. Ever the Good Shepherd, He drives away the wolves, hirelings and thieves, while at the same time calling His sheep around Him. It is the same spirit that motivates Him, on the one hand, to purify God's House of its polluters or that stimulates Him to help those impeded by human wickedness, on the other. They are just two sides of the same coin.

And for those who criticize Jesus for ignoring many other abuses crying for the attention of the social reformer, by striding into the temple to clean house, let it be said that He was not blind to the former. Rather, He simply recognized that the best way to deal with the blatantly iniquitous social conditions through which He walked was to bring judgment to the House of God first (Ezek. 9:6; I Peter 4:17). As long as the temple and people of God were opposed to the purposes of God, society could not be cured. But the contrary is also true: while the ruin of the people is the fault of its priests, the people faithful to God should also demand better priests! (Jer. 5:31). Jesus is no shallow social reformer easily satisfied with surface changes. He strode right to the heart of society's ills: a perverted and avaricious priesthood and a polluted temple.

**He cast them all out.** It is mistaken to suppose that the vendors and buyers said absolutely nothing, or that Jesus turned on them a superhuman gaze or divine radiance that stunned them into automatic submission. Although He certainly COULD have done so, is it necessary to the accomplishment of His task as this is seen in the Synoptics or even in John 2:12ff.? The submission of those who surrendered, when they were numerous enough and physically strong enough easily to have overpowered Jesus, may otherwise be accounted for:

1. There was moral power in Christ's sinlessness that made cowards of these materialists. His voice, ringing with zeal for God and hard as steel because He demanded truth and righteousness, pierced their long-sleeping conscience, accusing them of violating their own professed principles. So He had on His side the conscience, not only of the onlookers, but of the merchants themselves.
2. That Jesus could so single-handedly break up the priests' monopoly without any significant opposition may have been due not only to the majestic fury He expressed, but also to the popular support of thousands of pilgrims, resentful of the many years these greedy merchants had taken advantage of them. Although their own boldness was not ready to join Him in His attack, their heart could

definitely recognize the rightness of His deed. It was not unlikely that this very corruption of the temple drove the pious among the Essenes to consider this sanctuary "off limits" and justify themselves in offering sacrifices of their own elsewhere (Josephus, *Ant.*, XVIII,1,5). Lack of any public support for the merchants further weakened their will to resist.

3. He succeeded in doing what it would have taken a troop of soldiers to do, because He had the element of surprise in His favor and pressed His advantage without let-up until reaching His objective.

This majestic roughness is, rather, the sort of thing to be expected, if the Lord ever came suddenly to His temple (Mal. 3:1) to purify the Levites (Mal. 3:2, 3) and to begin the terrible judgment of God at the sanctuary (Ezek. 9:6), even if the temple cleansing does not exhaust all the meaning of these great prophecies.

## II. ROYAL REVERENCE

21:13 **And he saith unto them.** Jesus' action was no merely dramatic symbol left for others to interpret. His rationale must be clearly expressed in propositional revelation. **It is written:** from the form of Jesus' rhetorical question (as quoted by Mark 11:17, "Is it not written . . .?") which expected an affirmative answer, it is clear that the Lord hereby intended to defend His course of action on the basis of Biblical texts well-known and unquestionably accepted by His challengers. He depended upon the truthful, valid revelations of Old Testament Scriptures.

### A. WHAT GOD'S HOUSE SHOULD BE

**My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations (Isa. 56:7).**

Although throughout his Gospel Matthew has laid such obvious stress on the place of Gentiles in plan of God (see Special Study: "The Participation of Gentiles" at the end of this volume), it is surprising that he should have omitted what Mark quotes: "for all nations." This would perhaps have been an excellent opportunity to underscore the fact that God loved the Gentiles enough to accept their burnt offerings and sacrifices on His altar and give them joy in His house of prayer (Isa. 56:7a, b).

This omission cannot but draw attention to Jesus' true emphasis on the temple abuses which practically obstructed all Gentile attempts to worship God through *prayer*.

However, it could be fairly argued that Matthew did not HAVE to cite the missing phrase in order to make this point:

1. Because anyone who knew where the market was located, knew that the abuse to be corrected was hindering Gentiles, not Jewish, efforts to worship.
2. Because anyone who knew Isaiah 56:7 could automatically complete anything Matthew omitted, especially from their own familiarity with Isaiah's context that so clearly pictured universal religion beyond any racial, cultural or geographic discrimination. Access to God was not to be controlled nor hindered by sordid business interests of a bio-geographic elite. Rather, access to the God of Israel must remain universal, open to all, not blocked by the shameful comportment of this religion's representatives and custodians. On the other hand, the restoration of the rights of Gentiles in the temple courts may not have been emphasized by Matthew, because the early readers might have wrongly deduced that mere restoration of those rights would have sufficed, whereas God intended a totally new temple! (Eph. 2:11-22).

Nothing could sting the holders of religious power more than this public accusation that exposed them as flagrant violators of the very Word of God of which they claimed to be the only authorized defenders and interpreters. Worse yet, even outsiders—the non-Jews—knew that this area of the temple had been designed by God as a quiet, orderly place for their prayers, but that it had been sabotaged! (Study I Kings 8:29f., 33, esp. 41-43; Ps. 27:4; 65:4.) The avaricious and corrupt high priestly family stood before God and man as guilty of gross violation of God's original intent behind the temple's original function.

## B. WHAT GOD'S HOUSE HAD BECOME

**But you make it a den of robbers** (Jer. 7:11). In Jeremiah's day the temple was frequented by people who, while loudly professing their awareness that the Jerusalem sanctuary was really "the Temple of the Lord," nevertheless dealt unjustly with each other, oppressed

the alien, the fatherless and the widow, shed innocent blood and followed other gods, stole, murdered, committed adultery and perjury. Incredibly, they added insult to their injury of God by supposing that this manner of life could continue on indefinitely, precisely because of God's house in their midst AS A GOOD-LUCK CHARM against any possible future misfortunes. But God considered it really a **den of robbers**.

The objection, that a robbers' den is not used for robbing but as a refuge for robbers, misses the point, because, if anyone stumbled unawares into a "den of robbers" (= refuge, hiding place, home, etc.), he would as surely be robbed there as anywhere else. A Gentile who discovered God and His house and thinking it is a true temple, would be as surely robbed of his new-found faith and piety there by the temple's own custodians, as he would by being waylaid by the desecrations of the same people elsewhere (cf. Rom. 2:17-24!).

**You make it a den of robbers.** The glaring contrast between "house of prayer" and "den of robbers" places Jesus in diametric opposition to the priesthood's administration of the temple sanctioned by the elders. Thus He is charging this high body with profanity and is attacking an exceedingly powerful private interest. But the religion of the God of Israel must not be turned into a lucrative source of profit for anyone! Here once again we see the paradoxical converging of (1) the religious pride of the elect people of God and (2) the shamelessness of their immorality. Just as Isaiah and Jeremiah had done in their day, so now Jesus blasts Israel's religious pride and self-seeking, mercenary activities. A **den of robbers** was a verdict right out of their own Bible! Rather than offer the grace of God freely and generously to all people, the shepherds of Israel only grudgingly opened God's temple to non-Israelites, and so pampered Jewish national pride. They used God and temple for their own advantage, taking advantage of the weakness and ignorance of poor, innocent people. Exploiting people by charging exorbitant prices for sacrifices is no less the sin of stealing than is robbery.

Further, if Jesus is right in judging the temple to be governed by conditions also prevailing in Jeremiah's day, conditions that demanded divine vengeance, just as He had done earlier at Shiloh's tabernacle with identical justification (Jer. 7:12-15), would not these same conditions demand that God destroy the temple again? This

judgment by Jesus should alert us to expect Him to prophesy the temple's destruction. In this way He prepares the reader's mind for Matthew 23:38 and 24:2. In fact, a few decades later the temple actually became even more literally a cave of murderers, as the Assassins turned it into a theater for their atrocities. (See Josephus, *Wars*, IV,3,7; §§10,12; IV,6,3.) Yet, even Jeremiah offered mercy to those who repent (Jer. 7:5, 7). Does Jesus' citation of Jeremiah's ominous phrase imply that repentance is their only hope of saving their lives, their temple and their nation?

### III. RIGHT RESPONSE

21:14 **And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple.** This quiet sentence silences all who put down Jesus' temple cleansing to a reprehensible outburst of violent anger. The Lord's ringing condemnation of the unholy treatment of God's house and merciless exposure of its administrators certainly did not deter the needy from approaching this same Lord to seek merciful help. In the midst of Jesus' overturning of tables, scattering coins and knocking down benches, His roughness with the vendors, sellers and the indifferent traipsing through the temple and despite His wrath against all that defiled, these needy people were unable to discern any pettishness or rejection in His words or manner. Rather, in the marvelous compassion He was displaying toward the Gentiles as He cleared the market out of the courtyard designated for their worship, the troubled Hebrews could sense a kindness that invited them too.

### WHY THESE MIRACLES IN THE TEMPLE?

By what right does the Nazarene turn God's House from a market into a HOSPITAL?! How would His miracles be conducive to prayer, when His own protest implied that the market distracted the mind from God? Would not the amazed witnesses' exclamations be as fully distracting to Gentiles as would the bawling of cattle merchants and the clink of the money-changers' coins? How could He justify that?

1. These unfortunates may have approached Jesus, not immediately after the temple cleansing, but while "he was teaching daily in the temple" (Luke 19:47a). In fact, healing and instruction probably continued all the rest of that day. (See Matt. 21:17f.; Mark 11:12,

- 19.) If so, while Matthew's repeated expression, "in the temple" (vv. 12, 14, 15) seems to imply immediate connection with the cleansing, he does not offer us tight time connections. Jesus may have healed them after the stated hours for prayer or in some temple area other than in the Court of the Gentiles.
2. On the other hand, if He did these miracles right in the still untidy court before the dust had settled on the debris, even as the last hawker scrambled to collect his scattered shekels, Jesus desired to show how a righteous anger that eliminates what is wrong, is perfectly harmonious with doing what is positively right. Merciful healing for the sightless and crippled is motivated not only by compassionate love but also by a deep and holy anger at what left them helpless, anger enough to do the thing needed to eliminate that evil from their lives. (Cf. John 11:33, 35, 38; Mark 3:5; see my comments on 5:22.)
  3. If the Qumran *Rule of Congregation* (1 QM 2:5-22) excluded the lame, blind, deaf and dumb from the congregation and from the Messianic banquet, and if the Mishnah excluded them from appearing before the Lord in the temple (cf. Chagigah 1:1), then, Jesus, the Lord of the temple, not only encouraged their approach, but also qualified them to worship by eliminating their disability and consequent disqualification.
  4. If the temple is a "house of prayer," then should not these, who believe Jesus to be the direct channel for the power of God, address their petitions to Him in His Father's house? This was converted by Jesus into no mere hospital, where the infirm may convalesce slowly, but into a veritable door of Heaven where men were made perfectly and instantly whole by the power of Him whose House it was. If the temple IS God's house, as Jesus declares, cannot He do anything He wants to in His own house?!
  5. The exalted authority, that our Lord had claimed to exercise, required evidence of His right so to act. The miracles became His credentials to support His implied right. It is clear that God approved, since no man could do these things unless God were with him! (John 3:2; 10:37f.; 14:10f.; Acts 10:38).
  6. Further, if the temple's purpose was to turn Gentiles' attention to the true, living God who answers prayers and really helps men on earth, then Jesus' miracles, which tended to produce this very effect (Matt. 15:31), harmonized perfectly with the temple's intended use.

**And he healed them**, not in some obscure village or distant desert where none could test the reality of His power to cure. Rather, He did it in the capital city, right in its temple under the skeptical scrutiny of His severest critics. And because all was so public, the multitudes of eye-witnesses, awed by His miracles and amazed by His teaching (Mark 11:18; Luke 19:48), proved to be a psychologically impassible barrier around Jesus, stymying His foes' plot to suppress Him. Nothing could stop Him from doing good, whether on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-14) or in the temple! In short, He practiced His own principle that God wants mercifulness and not merely sacrifice. (See notes on 12:7.)

#### IV. RAGING REACTIONARIES

21:15 **The chief priests** were Sadducees (Acts 5:17; Josephus, *Ant.*, XX,9,1). These Sadducean high priests were dedicated, among other things, to these points:

1. A purely materialistic world-view that all but denied God's right to be present in and act within His own creation. (Cf. Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8.)
2. A liberal view of the Old Testament canon that left little room for conscientious service to God that tried to go by ALL the Book.

Jesus' dramatic protest and His appeal to Scripture instantly drew fire from the aristocracy, because He threatened the security of their hold on a lucrative source of income. Until the Last Week, objections to Jesus had come from the Pharisees. Now, however, He has just touched the nerve-center of the high priests, the temple. Consequently, these elitists will figure even more prominently among Jesus' opponents until they all finally collaborate to perpetrate His judicial murder. (They are mentioned 19 times: 21:15,23,45; 26:3,14,47,57,59,62,63,65; 27:1,3,6,12,20,41,62; 28:11.)

**When the chief priests and the scribes saw**, they became first-hand witnesses, therefore qualified to give authoritative testimony to the reality of His marvelous deeds. What did they see?

##### 1. **The wonderful things that He did.**

- a. His proper display of orthodox zeal for the holiness of the temple, backed by Scripture they could not publicly deny.
  - (1) Although Sadducees neglected the prophets (Edersehim, *Life*, II,397), the Lord did not hesitate to cite them as

God's Word, because of their thoroughly adequate attestation as spokesmen for God and because of their place in the more widely recognized Jewish canon.

(2) Sadducean rejection of the prophets would be exposed even further, if they had publicly objected to His citations from Isaiah and Jeremiah, for "all men held them to be prophets of God" too. (Cf. Author's *Matthew*, III,434f.)

b. They must have stood speechless in the presence of Jesus' undeniable miracles (21:14), because they were unquestionable evidence of real, supernatural power operative through Jesus in the realm of the real, testable, material world. This they could not oppose without denying what they themselves had personally witnessed nor without reverting to the already discredited Pharisean contention that His power was really that of the devil (Matt. 12:24ff.).

**2. and the children that were crying in the temple and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David.** We see here:

a. The joyous enthusiasm of children attracted to Jesus because they knew He loved them. He was no ogre whose supposedly vicious attack in the temple should have frightened children. Rather, they approach Him, shouting His praise shortly after the temple cleansing and in psychologically direct connection with the Messianic demonstration the day before during the triumphal entry (Mark 11:1, 12, 15). The temple cleansing rekindled their enthusiasm and set them to chanting His Messianic glory. He really wanted "the little children to come to" Him (cf. 19:13-15 notes) and they could sense this even without artificial invitations or prompting.

b. The unprejudiced sincerity of these children is obvious in their evident lack of that self-protecting prudence so characteristic of their elders who could better grasp something of the deadly struggle taking place between Jesus and authorities.

c. The manifest rightness of these children's confession is vindicated by no less an authority than Jesus Himself. However little they understood the issues at stake, what they uttered was TRUTH, and, as far as it went, that TRUTH must be defended and believed and acted upon, even if spoken by children.

But, having witnessed all this evidence of the Lord's glory, rather than submitting their souls to His leadership, **the chief priests and scribes . . . were indignant!** Godet (*John*, 364) notes:

We meet here a fact, which will repeat itself at every manifestation of the Lord's glory; a twofold impression is produced, according to the moral predisposition of the witnesses; some find in the act of Jesus nourishment for their faith; for others the same act becomes a subject of offense. It is the pre-existing moral sympathy or antipathy that determines the impression.

The Sadducean temple priests are deeply threatened by Jesus, because, far from keeping His particular claims or teaching to Himself, He insisted on asserting His understanding of God right in Jerusalem and even in the temple precincts themselves! Unpopular with the majority, the priestly power had no refuge other than the temple, and the Galilean Prophet publicly threatened not only the impending end of their monopoly on the temple but also of the power they derived therefrom (Luke 13:35; cf. Matt. 23:38; John 2:20 with Matt. 26:61). Many reasons serve to explain the hierarchy's outrage:

1. They were the offenders, enraged at Christ's rebuking them by exposing their gross, wanton unfaithfulness to their God-given duty, in the presence of those whose opinion of their piety they had cultivated with great care.
2. They were pompous officials, men of rank and dignity, annoyed by the boldness and "naughtiness" of the children in their holy temple.
3. Because they were unbelievers, they expressed impotent rage at any form of public recognition given to Jesus' claims to Christhood, thinking it childish blasphemy, while totally blind to the blasphemy of their own lives. **Hosanna to the Son of David:** because this shout is the basis of the priests' objection to Jesus' tacit permission of the children's praise, it forever proves how Jewish authorities of Jesus' day understood this title. Now, none can argue, as some modern Jewish scholars try, that these words do not convey the concept of a personal Messiah promised to Israel who would actually be born of David's family. Rather, to any objection that those children were only singing innocent Psalms, whereas silence was called for, the authorities of Israel

then present silence these quibbles by practically shouting, "Do you not hear what they are saying?!" These understood.

4. Because they were fearful, they may have been maddened by their own ineptness in dealing with a problem that rightly lay within their responsibility to solve.
  - a. They lacked courage to act in their proper official capacity as the guarantors of orthodoxy. (Contrast Saul of Tarsus!)
  - b. They feared His popular influence. Their concern would be for national security, their own position and nation (John 11:48). They clearly grasped the universality of His appeal, as representative groups from the entire nation (*ho laòs gàr hàpas*) sympathized with Him.
  - c. Or did they fear the tremendous firepower at His disposal, which had not yet been unleashed against them? Did they fear Him as a powerful magician in the service of Satan? (Cf. John 18:4-8 with Matt. 26:53.)
  - d. While we cannot absolutely discount a supernatural manifestation of the majesty of His deity only slightly dimmed by human flesh, is it likely that Jesus had to awe them with this glory to hold them at bay until their hour had struck? (Study Luke 22:52f.)
  - e. They feared the people whose applause for Jesus heralded Him as their Hero. They could foresee that, if they touched so much as a hair of Jesus' head, an aroused citizenry would begin to clamor for their expulsion. Could they ride out the furious firestorm that must issue?

21:16. These politicians, who socialized with those who could promote their interests and used the little people for their own ends, were aghast that the Galilean dared to defend the cause of the down-trodden, the foreigner, and diseased and the juveniles. So, frustrated by their own lack of arguments against His miracles, afraid to object to the multitudes' joyous demonstrations of religious enthusiasm, and cornered by their own confusion, they can only object weakly to the unsought praise given Jesus by little children! Helplessly, they ask, **Do you hear what these are saying?**

Should it appear unlikely that there were crowds of excited children in the temple courts, since surely the temple police would have quickly and capably stopped them, had they really been shouting what Matthew reports, notice that:

1. Jesus' critics hold Him responsible to attend to the children, implying that HE must shut them up, as if such police did not have that responsibility.
2. Is it unthinkable that, during the great feasts, when the whole nation was gathered together, the children should have organized themselves for games during their free time, or even for just such praise and dancing as seems evident here? Let Matthew's critics go study children!
3. The question uppermost with the priests is not noise per se, but WHAT the boys were shouting.
4. Further, THIS day was like no other upon which modern critics should base their judgment, since, as Barclay (*Matthew*, II,274) says:  
 Things were happening that day in the Temple Court which had never happened before. It was not every day that the traders and the money-changers were sent packing, and . . . the blind and the lame were healed. Maybe ordinarily it would have been impossible for the children to shout like this, but then this was no ordinary day.

Their complaint is as ironic as the whole scene is natural:

1. They who for so long had promoted the noisy market in the temple, with its stinking animals and dusty, haggling merchants, because there was money in it for them, now sanctimoniously declare themselves to be scandalized by the singing of innocent lads who thus desecrate the sacred temple of the Lord!
2. Worse, they are now as wrong in demanding the crushing of the boys' enthusiasm, as they had earlier been mistaken in not abolishing the temple bazaar themselves!

Since Jesus could have quieted the children, but had not done so, the priests lay the blame on Him for allowing the shameful situation to continue. In this implied rebuke, these Sadducees echo the Pharisees' bitter jealousy, "Master, rebuke thy disciples!" (Luke 19:39). Perhaps they expect this provincial prophet to back down, mumble an apology or perhaps sneak out of town. Instead, He meets their challenge with quiet defiance.

## V. A REFINED REMINDER

21:16 **And Jesus said to them, Yes.** In fact, could He have FAILED to notice language the content of which cried out for notice? He

calmly goes about His work as Messiah, mirroring the ancient adage: "Let another's mouth praise you." Without explicitly affirming His Messiahship, He deliberately permitted the boys to chant the truth that He longed to impress upon people by His deeds and teaching.

The fuming authorities ask, "Do you not HEAR?" to which Jesus demands, **Have YOU never READ?** Had they known their Bible—as they above all Hebrews should have known it—had they recalled those very Scriptures they claimed to honor and teach, they could have remembered that text which completely vindicated everything to which they had just now objected!

In order better to appreciate Jesus' highly condensed rebuttal, we must comprehend the objection that provoked it. In fact, both the objection and Jesus' answer are highly compressed, implying several unstated propositions. We might attempt to express the detractors' unstated logic as follows:

1. The children call you "Son of David," a title equivalent to "Messiah," our national Hebrew Ideal Man, God Anointed sent to bless Israel.
2. But you, Jesus, are but a common man like any other and your program is a bad representation of the great Messianic Kingdom of David's Son.
3. Therefore, you could not be the Messiah, God's Ideal Man, Son of David.
4. Therefore, honesty should compel you to silence the children's ignorant and misdirected praise. Consistency would demand that your anxiety to remove what you term "disorder in God's House" should also eliminate these urchins' unjustifiable outbursts.

Their fundamental objection is thus based on what appears to them to be His painfully evident common humanness. They suppose that His ordinariness disqualifies Him for Messiahship. So, how does Jesus answer the dignitaries? He simply quoted Psalm 8:2.

**MATTHEW 21:16**

**HEBREW ORIGINAL OF PSALM 8:2**

**Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings**

Out of the mouth of children and sucklings because of your adversaries, You have created a power to still Your enemy and the revengeful.

**You have perfected praise.**

Many correctly affirm that Psalm 8 is not Messianic in the usual sense of explicitly predicting some phase of Christ's ministry, person or work. Nevertheless, that Psalm 8 is definitely Christological

(= Messianic) is forever established by Jesus who used it to defend, not merely little children, but specifically to vindicate **what they are saying**, i.e. praise to Jesus as Messiah. So the CONTENT of the boys' praise finds its defense, according to the Lord, in Psalm 8 too. We may expect, then, that this Psalm describe, even indirectly, what Messiah must be or do. In fact, is there any reason, inherent in the Psalm or in Jesus' situation, why the connection Jesus draws between what the children are saying and the Psalm itself, should not be weighed into a proper exegesis of this text?

Because Jesus' recorded answer consists in a brief citation of one portion of a verse from Psalm 8, the question arises:

1. Did He intend to refer exclusively to the verse cited?
  - a. If so, is He merely making some logical argument, as, for example, from the smaller to the greater? That is, "If infants can speak truly when praising God, as Psalm 8 shows, why complain, if larger children speak truly about me? Deal with the infants in Psalm 8 first, then come complain about these bigger children here!"
  - b. Or, is He leading these priestly scholars into the deeper meaning of the verse cited? And would not that meaning be rooted in its context? But this conducts us to the following possibility:
2. Is He not, rather, alluding to the entire Psalm in which the verse cited not only finds its context and significance, but of which it is also the capsulized summation?

If accepted, this latter view includes the former and would reveal Jesus' interpretation of the Psalm's true meaning and, at the same time, would reveal the smashing brilliance of His defense.

So, if we have correctly surmised that Jesus intends to establish the correctness of the children's words by citing this Psalm, we must also correctly intuit the logical steps by which He does this. Jesus' highly condensed argument may be expressed in the following equations:

God's Ideal Man = Messiah = David's Son = Little Baby = Man at his weakest = God's normal means to silence His enemies, rule the earth and glorify Himself. Therefore, a fully human, apparently feeble Messiah is not unthinkable, but even highly probable. Therefore, my genuine humanness is no disqualification for Messiahship, but rather an extremely appropriate qualification and an invitation to examine my other credentials.

Consider each step individually:

## I. GOD'S IDEAL MAN TO RULE THE EARTH IS THE MESSIAH

- A. This proposition is only apparently extraneous to the general discussion, but is really fundamental to it and most appropriate.
  - 1. In fact, the Hebrew officials could not discern in Jesus that exquisite combination of qualities they should have associated with the Ideal Man whom God would anoint to be Messiah.
  - 2. Further, by pointing His detractors to Psalm 8, the Lord instantly raises the issue of what sort of Ideal Man God has in mind to be His Anointed One.
- B. Thus, if then-contemporary Judaism thought of their Ideal Man as a Jewish Superman, their concept must be modified to match God's promises concerning the true nature of "the Anointed One."
- C. God's Ideal Man, the fitting Leader of mankind, is Messiah, a fact implicitly recognized by the Biblical Judaism of the centuries preceding Jesus' appearance on earth. (Many precious prophecies laid the groundwork for this concept, e.g.: Gen. 3:15; Deut. 18:15-18; II Sam. 7:11-16; Ps. 2; 110:1-4; Isa. 7:14; 8:13f.; 9:2-7; 11:1ff.; 40:3-11; 42:1-7; 52:13—53:12; 61:1ff.; Zech. 9:9; Mal. 3:1, etc.)
- D. It would be a temptation for Judaism to make the mistake of assuming that Messiah would suddenly appear in His glory, fully endowed with supernatural power, however bearing no really radical connection with the misery and humiliation involved in the human condition. Such a view, however, must be corrected by the observation that, since the Christ is a true Son of David, He must be thought of as a real, human baby born of real Davidic ancestry. (See Prop. III below.)

## II. THE MESSIAH IS THE SON OF DAVID

- A. No right-minded Hebrew would dare debate this proposition in Jesus' day (22:41ff.). Then-current Judaism, in fact, expected a personal Messiah to be born in a given town and of a prophetically indicated parentage (Matt. 23:6; John 7:41f.).

- B. Can the sure oath of God to David fail to establish one of his descendants upon the throne (II Sam. 7:11-16; Ps. 132:11-18)?

### III. THE SON OF DAVID WILL BE A LITERAL BABY

- A. If the Christ must be born of the lineage of David, how could this occur, unless He were a perfectly normal, human BABY, although he be the royal child? Does Messiahship, or birth in to David's family, somehow exempt "the Son of David" from being someone's little boy? Whatever else may be affirmed of Him, should not Messiah of all people, be authentically HUMAN, born of human parentage? Could anyone doubt that the "Child born to us" to reign on David's throne (Isa. 9:6f.), the son of the virgin (Isa. 7:14), must be genuinely MAN, i.e. fully human?
- B. And if He must be the Ideal Man, should He not be born a common Baby, so as to identify perfectly with His people of whom He would be the true, typical representative?

### IV. BUT A BABY IS MAN AT HIS WEAKEST

- A. Even though He be the Son of David and future Messiah, how could (= why should) this baby be exempt from all the usual, negative aspects of the human condition? If Jewish theologians cannot conceive of the great "Son of David" as appearing on earth in so inglorious a form as that of a little baby, they must be taught that, despite the striking insignificance of Man, God entrust to HIM the gigantic task of administration of the world to come. (This concept is developed by Paul; Heb. 2:6ff.; I Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22). If man's common humanness be construed as a stumbling block and a cause for the disgrace of disqualification for God's great work, let it be remembered that man IN HIMSELF is nothing.
- B. Here, then, is David's original understanding expressed in Psalm 8. The Psalm's theme is: "God's Glory Revealed in His Glorification of Man," a theme developed in three steps:
1. Man's comparative frailty is evident in his microscopic insignificance in contrast to the magnitude of God's heavens (Ps. 8:3, 4).

2. Man's conferred dignity is evidence that any greatness he enjoys has been granted him by God (Ps. 8:5).
    - a. God made man just lower than Heavenly Beings.
    - b. God crowned man with glory and honor.
  3. Man's constituted authority, as seen in his influence over the rest of earth's creatures, is also God's gift (Ps. 8:6-8).
- C. Therefore, God's glorification of Man forever proves that any dignity and importance we attribute to man is contingent, not absolute; conferred, not earned. For the Psalmist, if there is anything great about man, it is because God graciously conferred it on him. There is nothing inherent in man—either in his native or his acquired abilities or in his personal or group achievements—that qualifies him for such an exalted position. Man's greatness is the unmerited gift from GOD. Human dignity has no reality or meaning, except as it finds these in God's gracious purpose for delegating it to him.
- D. Therefore, if the Son of David must be a little baby, man at his weakest, it is not unthinkable that Messianic royalty should be conferred upon him, despite his apparent weaknesses and lack of qualification in the judgment of the great of earth.
- E. If this proposition seems threatening, because babyhood is the nadir experience of human weakness, the tension is resolved by the glorious truth of the proposition which follows:

**V. BUT MAN AT HIS WEAKEST IS GOD'S NORMAL INSTRUMENT (Psalm 8)**

- A. The theme of Psalm 8 is introduced by a principle that explains why God should choose to elevate man to such exceptional dignity: although our Lord possesses all majesty in heaven and on earth, He has chosen to deal with His opposers and enemies, not by some personal feat of heavenly might, but by using MAN to do it (Ps. 8:1f.). To rule the world and still His enemies, our God needs only that power available in His effective use of what all would deem to be absurdly inadequate means, e.g. human beings. (Cf. the voices of children versus God's mighty enemies, Ps. 8:2;

puny man versus the total creation, vv. 3-8.) And, because this Psalm essentially summarizes Genesis 1 and 2, we understand that this concept is God's typical procedure, not the exception. God glorifies His name and humiliates His enemies and He utilizes firepower no more formidable than the spontaneous praise of those who are little better than BABES;

B. The Psalm establishes God's normal procedure: He delights to display His greatness by making skillful use of absurdly feeble instruments to produce incredible effective results. Therefore, human depreciation of any of God's servants or means, based on what proud mortals may eventually think of His servants' apparent unworthiness, insignificance or obscurity, is absolutely no indication of their usefulness or worth to God. Whom God qualifies for His service is qualified, whether haughty sinners admit it or not! And God can enable him to succeed mightily at the task to which He sets him.

C. From the foregoing premises, it is now possible to see the point of Jesus' implied conclusion:

**VI. THEREFORE, A FULLY HUMAN, APPARENTLY FEEBLE MESSIAH IS NOT INCONCEIVABLE, BUT EVEN HIGHLY PROBABLE, BECAUSE FULLY VINDICATED BY SCRIPTURE (Psalm 8).**

A. The stumbling block for the theologians was not the humanness of the Messiah but that God could have sent so glorious a Christ in so inglorious a form! Because Psalm 8 speaks of the high irony of God's planning, should not Jesus' objectors reread it to understand that God has always used what is insignificant in man's eyes to bring Himself glory? (A not unknown principle: I Cor. 1:18-31; Matt. 11:25; II Cor. 12:7-10. Remember David's defeat of Goliath.)

B. By citing Psalm 8, Jesus dispatched the priests' implied arguments by teaching them to see God's normative use of common MEN, not supermen or angels, to praise Him and rule the earth. If the philosophical antsupernaturalism of the Sadducean chief priests keeps them from accepting Jesus' claims to be God's Son, therefore, in some sense, deity, then let them consider Him as a MAN! But let them do this in the light of God's purpose for Man as this is revealed in Scripture!

- C. By citing Psalm 8 in defense of the children's ascription of Messiahship to Him, Jesus implies that the long-awaited Christ, David's Son, must be fully MAN, even man at his weakest, a little baby. Because of these leaders' preconceptions as to what God's Kingdom and Messiah must be, they had lost their ability to look objectively at ANY man to wonder how God could use that man to glorify Himself. Had they looked at Jesus in this light, they would have been able to see those supernatural credentials which indisputably signalled God's stamp of approval upon Him as true "Son of David." By thinking that common humanness is unimportant as a proper condition of Messiahship, they also missed seeing the glorious condescension of God who, in the mortal clay of Jesus, prepared to conquer the Evil One. So, His very obvious humanness and lack of qualification in the eyes of His critics, should have been an argument for joining the children in praising God for giving such authority to MEN! (Cf. Matt. 9:8.) This is why the objection that, because Jesus seemed to them but a mere man He could not qualify to be "Son of David," is itself inappropriate. After all, could the Word of God (Psalm 8) be thought to have failed in its promise that, somehow, some MAN would bring to completion God's plan?
- D. By quoting Psalm 8, Jesus directed His questioners to check out His other qualifications, since David taught that whom-ever God elevates to high dignity is thereby qualified by His sovereign grace, and all previous estimates of THAT man's unworthiness must be revised! Let the chief priests quietly reflect upon His works, His character and His results. Even if they choked on His claims, upon reflection they might yet see how truly all that He did praised God.

From this standpoint, then, Psalm 8 contains no direct or unique reference either to the Messiah or to the little children's praising Him. Rather, it contained the principle: "God's glory is revealed in His glorification of Man," a principle most appropriately applicable to Jesus as Messiah. In fact, man's highest dignity and actual universal dominion over the earth would be realized only in Him (Heb. 2:6ff.; I Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22). From this perspective, Jesus Himself was one such "little child," whose natural weakness God would turn into sufficient strength to defeat His enemies and silence the revengeful,

rule the earth and glorify God. (Cf. Rev. 12:5; 17:14 as pictorial representation of this same truth: it is the Lamb, not the great dragon or the beasts, that conquers!)

Because Psalm 8 is not strictly Messianic, it is of much wider application. In fact, the short-sighted chief priests, by despising the children's praise, failed to understand that those feeble adorers of God, whose childlike affirmations of faith in God's Christ were real, were even then effectively defeating God's adversaries. How did they do this?

1. God was proving to sceptics that humble, teachable people can actually see what is objectively "there," i.e. Jesus' true Messiahship. These children, untrammelled by prejudice and tradition, let themselves be completely convinced by the impression Jesus produced on their minds, whereas the Sadducean high priests' minds were bogged down in rationalizations and biased misjudgments. However keen their intellect, these men of corrupt heart could look upon the Son of David in person and yet not discern His true identity nor glorify God for it! But their numerous doubts and cynical criticisms were devastated by the guileless, spontaneous confession of love and trust by these children. The unfeigned purity of feeling expressed in the chanting of these children warmed Jesus, and proved that ALL men COULD HAVE recognized and praised Him as did they. At the same time it condemned ("silenced" Ps. 8:2) those who not only would not worship Him, but, worse, began to plot His murder.
2. The "little children" concept in Scripture is God's normal procedure. Therefore, the scribes' estimations of what is required to establish the great Messianic Kingdom are all miscalculations. If God can take what appears to be a common Galilean, Jesus of Nazareth, and utilize Him to do all that is involved in being "the Son of David," if one day God will vindicate the rightness of the little children's praise over against the established conclusions of theological scholarship of that day, if He can transform simple fishermen and taxcollectors, farmers and housewives into frontline troops to bring about the subjugation of the earth, then God is acting as He always has and His Kingdom is right on course! (I Cor. 1:18-31).
  - a. The Messiah's Kingdom, for its advancement, needs no more formidable weaponry than that strength wielded by common believers so despised by worldlings enamored with the usual arms of "manly" warfare. (Cf. II Cor. 3:4-6; 4:7; 10:3-5; 12:8.)

- b. God's choice of adults, who are hardly better than little children, to promote the progress of His Kingdom, is ample proof of His real control over it. (Study notes on Matt. 11:25f.; 18:3f.) To defeat the awful power of evil, God maneuvers only the awesome might of the meek! (21:5, the Messianic King; 11:29).
3. Jesus' own program for world conquest is also in Psalm 8, as He too had already made the "little children" concept His own. He knew that the best kind of praise and service to God is that which comes from simple, sincere people who can receive from God without judging Him or having to tell Him what He can or cannot do. Since ordinary people, who did not count for much on the social scale, recognized and praised Jesus at a time when their great ones refused to do so, in God's eyes they condemned the angry arrogance of His opposition. Those who glorify human accomplishments, who seek and give human praise, and who continue to reject our Lord Jesus Christ, do not deserve to be made citizens of God's Kingdom. And they shall not have it! (Luke 12:32). In short, the followers of Jesus, the CHURCH, is really the sort of Messianic program that God has always had in mind. The great God of heavenly armies would perfect His praise, not by some dazzling display of divine power nor by the eloquence of great, wise or learned men of earth—as men expect Him to—, but by the effective use of sincere, humble people who can speak His truth taught them by Jesus! According to Jesus, as the old hymn has it,

Not with swords' loud clashing  
 Nor roll of stirring drums  
 With deeds of love and mercy  
 The heavenly Kingdom comes.

4. To recognize and praise God's Christ is to recognize and praise God Himself (John 5:22f.; Matt. 10:40; Luke 10:16). The enthusiasm of the children who praised Jesus, in essence, said that God had marvellously succeeded in bringing His Anointed into the world. So God received glory as truly from these irrepressible little boys as from choirs of angels around His throne, and should not Jesus defend them? And should not the most fitting setting for it be God's House?
5. Even if someone noticed that Psalm 8 spoke directly of children's praising the LORD, whereas Jesus cited it to defend children's praising Himself, His citation is legitimate, because, in a very true sense, Jesus is really Jahweh come to earth as a genuine human

being to subject all things to Himself (Matt. 1:23; Phil. 2:5-7; John 1:1, 14, 18). Since Jesus had already furnished ample proof that His claims to deity are all true, the burden of proof to the contrary lay on those who denied it. (For His claims, see notes on 11:27; for His proofs, think of John 10:37f.; 14:10f. and 3:2.)

## VI. A RETREAT FOR REFLECTION AND REST

**21:17 And he left them and went forth out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.** Because Matthew used a participle (*katalipòn*, here rendered "left"), which may just as easily be a circumstantial temporal participle subordinate to the main verb (*exêlthen*, "went forth"), it may be rendered "when He left them, He went forth." There is therefore no contradiction with Mark's information that the Lord actually left the temple much later that day (Mark 11:19). Yet, *katalipòn* has something of the flavor of "to abandon, leave to one's destiny," (Rocci, 989). So it is not mistaken to see the Lord as having verbally silenced His critics with a deft parry from Scripture, then turning on His heel, leaving them to ponder His words (cf. Matt. 16:4b). Although *he left* the chief priests and scribes fuming, the crowds stayed right with Him, because the rest of that day was given over to teaching on such a popular level that literally hundreds of people crowded around Him to absorb His lessons (Mark 11:18; Luke 19:48).

**He went forth out of the city** for several possible reasons:

1. The city of Jerusalem, during Passover week, teemed with pilgrims, as the entire Jewish nation gathered for the feast, bringing in tourists from all over the Mediterranean world. Edersheim (*Temple*, 31), citing Tacitus, affirmed that within the city dwelt a population of 600,000 people, but which, according to Josephus, swelled to a figure between two and three million at feast time. The conditions in the crowded metropolis pushed rabbis to declare that, during the feasts—except on the first night—the people might camp outside the city, however within the limits of a sabbath-day's journey. Hence, hospitality outside the crowded, noisy city would bring welcome rest to the Savior.
2. Further, **he went forth . . . to Bethany and lodged there**, not unlikely because His three friends of Bethany, who had hosted Him on many other occasions, would perhaps insist that He lodge with them again (cf. Luke 10:38ff.; John 11:2f.; 12:1-8; Matt. 26:6-13).

*Bethany*, in fact, being just over the Mount of Olives 3 km (under 2 mi.) to the east of the city (John 11:18), on the eastern slope of the mount (cf. Luke 24:50 with Acts 1:12), furnished a handy base to and from which He could commute everyday to Jerusalem, returning each evening (Luke 21:37f.; Mark 11:11, 12, 15, 19, 20, 27).

3. Another possible reason for spending the nights outside Jerusalem was Jesus' own use of proper caution. Even though He was perfectly confident that none could really arrest Him until the hour assigned for it by God, He prudently avoided their clutches by staying just out of their immediate reach.

### WHY DID JESUS PURIFY THE TEMPLE?

This is Phase II of the Messianic Offensive. Jesus' assault on Jerusalem began with the Messianic "triumphal entry." This is proved by Matthew's direct connection drawn between the temple-cleansing with the bold Messianic declaration made during the entry. Jesus recognized that the real enemy of Israel was not Rome. His strategy, therefore, lay not in political or military power struggles, but in making men pure before God; He attacked the real enemy, Satan, not the apparent foe, the State. Israel, He sees, must be freed, not from occupation to soldiers, but from preoccupation with sin.

1. Was Jesus' purpose merely to criticize the hypocritical worship of the temple's custodians, who, on the excuse of honoring God, turned it into a source of financial advantage for themselves? This certainly harmonizes with the position occupied by the ancient prophets. In fact, Jesus stands impressively and solidly in the great prophetic tradition and fully supports all that His predecessors had decried. He would therefore need no further vindication of His actions.

To those who question the permanent good done by His mechanical purification of the temple if He cleansed not their hearts, thus stopping the external abuse while leaving their wicked mentality, let it be answered that He justified His deed by appeal to the Law and the Prophets. If people could be made sensitive to the divine authority of these, perhaps they could also be led to acknowledge their need for repentance and be brought all the way to confess Him whom God sent.

2. Is there DEITY implied here? Since Jesus had connected the ministry of John the Baptist with the prophecy of Malachi 3 (Matt.

11:10, 14), and since John was the messenger to appear just before the Lord Himself should suddenly appear in His temple to purify, should not the whole, complex event of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, and particularly in the temple to cleanse it, be seen as a fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy? But would the reader have drawn this conclusion from such distant premises? Nevertheless, Matthew's deliberate connection of the temple cleansing with the Messianic Entry of Israel's divine King (cf. 21:4f. and Zech. 9:9) intends to interpret this temple cleansing in terms of Jesus' divine dignity. In light of Zechariah 9:9, Jesus acted out the Messianic symbolism. He expressed His justice by refusing to tolerate the profaning of God's House. He showed His meekness and victory by healing the blind and lame and by accepting the evidence of how deeply His influence had penetrated the masses of Israel by justifying the praise of those who are often last of all to be affected by intellectual choices, the children. While He did not defend His actions as evidence of His essential Sonship (as in the case of the first cleansing, John 2:16: "my Father's house"), His deeds are not inconsistent with it. Rather, they are what we might expect of One fully conscious of His Sonship. His felt consciousness of deity and sovereignty over the temple did not have to be stated as the basis of His actions. This could be amply demonstrated in His own place for teaching and healing. Nevertheless, because we have already seen that in Jesus Christ we have "something greater than the temple" (12:6), we are already prepared psychologically to see it as part of Jesus' Messianic symbolism to claim Lordship over the temple by restoring it to its right use.

3. Or is this gesture a visual announcement that God is about to abandon the temple, leaving it and its hypocritical worshippers to the natural consequences of His abandoning their house which they so flagrantly abused and polluted (23:38)? From this standpoint, His gesture is more than merely symbolic Messianism. It is the sentence of a holy God who cleanses His own House one last time in vigorous protest against its repulsive sordidness, to show His justification for abandoning it altogether later.

The judgment that occurred symbolically in the condemnation of the leafy, but unfruitful, fig tree, is repeated even more clearly in the judgment upon the nation's authorities. Like the barren fig tree, the important question and sole justification for the temple's continued existence, was its real usefulness. It is NOW

performing the task for which it was created? If not, it must be cleansed or pruned a year or so, and then eliminated (cf. Luke 13:6-9).

4. His act is concretely practical. Like a snowplow laboring to reach isolated communities starving for essential provisions for life, Jesus was bull-dozing aside all that hindered needy Gentiles from reaching the life-giving God of Israel. All that blocked access to God must be ruthlessly removed, regardless of the apparent validity of the rationalizations used to justify it.

Could there be any connection between this cleansing of the temple and the fact that various religious groups, notably the Essene community, were out of fellowship with the temple and refused it because of the corrupt priesthood and the profaned worship that took place there? (Cf. Maggioni, *Luca*, 247.) They affirmed that the true temple was the community, especially theirs, and that true worship was a godly life and observance of the law (without temple observances, of course). For these Hebrew monks, however, the temple had to be replaced by a pure community, because the former had been profaned. But Jesus shows the Essenes to be mistaken, because, so long as the Jerusalem temple stood, it was the true route of access to God and might not be substituted until God's purposes for its existence had been realized. Rather than substitute something else for it, He cleansed it.

Jesus desired to prepare God's House once more for use as a TEMPLE, where silence and orderliness facilitated reverent worship or teaching. The uproar of the market made prayer impossible, so the people of God effectually robbed the humble, seeking Gentiles of their opportunity to satisfy the haunting longing of their soul by prayer in a suitable atmosphere conducive to access to the living God. Was it likely that the prayer of Psalm 67 could be prayed or answered?

5. Why cleanse the temple? Because it was Passover! If there ever were a time when preparation for the Feast of Unleavened Bread should include the elimination of the old leaven, it was now. Jesus must sweep away all the old leaven of human selfishness, the meaningless external observances and the private interest linked with money and power, all flourishing at the expense of zeal for God's House (cf. I Cor. 5:6-8).

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. According to Mark, from where were Jesus and His disciples coming when they entered the temple?
2. Whom did Jesus find in the temple that should not have been there?
3. In precisely what part of the temple was the abuse taking place? How do you know?
4. Why were these people there? Did they supply a need for the worshippers? If so, what?
5. What was so wrong about what was done by the people Jesus drove out of the temple?
6. Name some Old Testament heroes who had taken similar vigorous action to protect the holiness of God and that which had been dedicated to Him?
7. According to Mark, Jesus took the offensive not only against the sellers and moneychangers, but also against others. Who were these and why did Jesus attack them too?
8. What two passages of Scripture did Jesus cite to justify His actions?
9. What are the similarities and differences between John's account of the temple cleansing and those of Matthew, Mark and Luke (cf. John 2:13-25)?
10. What effect did the temple cleansing have upon the chief priests and scribes?
11. What effect did it have upon the simple, common people?
12. After the cleansing of the temple, who approached Jesus to be helped by Him? What sort of help did they seek?
13. Who continued to keep up the popular enthusiasm expressed during the triumphal entry the day before? What slogans were being shouted? What did the words mean?
14. What was the basis of the objections the religious authorities raised to the cries of the children?
15. What answer did Jesus give to justify what the children were saying? Where did He get His answer? What did He mean to communicate by it?
16. Where did Jesus go after the cleansing of the temple?
17. How did Jesus busy Himself for the rest of the day in the temple after cleansing it (Luke 19:47f.; Mark 11:18)?
18. According to Mark and Luke, how did the rulers of the people react to Jesus' bold defense of His cleansing the temple?

19. According to Mark and Luke, how did the common people react to Jesus?
20. Where did Jesus go to spend the night? Who else lived there? When had He been there before? What else took place there connected with the life of Jesus?

## SECTION 56

JESUS CURSES FIG TREE AND  
TEACHES DISCIPLES FAITH

(Parallel: Mark 11:12-14, 20-25)

TEXT: 21:18-22

18 Now in the morning as he returned to the city, he hungered.  
19 And seeing a fig tree by the way side, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only; and he saith unto it, Let there be no fruit from thee henceforward for ever. And immediately the fig tree withered away.

20 And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How did the fig tree immediately wither away?

21 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do what is done to the fig tree, but even if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done. 22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. If Matthew knew quite well that the cursing of the fig tree preceded the cleansing of the temple, rather than vice versa, what motives could have seemed valid to him to invert the chronological order of these events?
- b. If Jesus is the Son of God, or God incarnate as the Christians say, why was He hungry? Does God get hungry?!
- c. If Jesus is the Son of God, why did He approach the tree, as Mark admits, "to see if he could find anything on it"? Could he not have already known everything about it by using His presumed prophetic intuition? Should not the fact that He was disappointed by the tree be considered evidence against His possessing supernatural knowledge? If not, why not?
- d. By what right does Jesus permit Himself to gather fruit from a tree that does not belong to Him? What does the Law of Moses

say about this? Is He guilty of theft or presumption, according to Jewish law?

- e. If Mark affirms that “it was not the season for figs” (Mark 11:13), why should Jesus have any right to expect fruit on that tree? Is it not unfair on His part to expect a tree to do what it cannot?
- f. On the basis of what facts could we be sure that Jesus COULD have known that the tree had not produced the figs He expected to find there?
- g. On what basis could He have been certain that it would never produce them in the future?
- h. If this tree belonged to someone, by what right does Jesus destroy the property of others? Or, if the tree does not belong to Him and actually is someone else’s property, how is He actually helping that owner by His action?
- i. By what right can Jesus curse, and so destroy, this “unfortunate” fig tree? Is it a morally conscious being, capable of sinning by not bearing fruit? What had it done to deserve the severity of Jesus’ cursing?
- j. If “the fig tree withered at once,” as Matthew says, why did not the disciples notice it until the next day, as Mark affirms?
- k. Why did the disciples marvel? Should they not have already become thoroughly accustomed to Jesus’ miracles by now?
- l. What is the relationship between a fig tree cursed because it did not bear fruit worthy of its own nature, and prayer that is so effective that does “impossible” things? Jesus’ statement seems to draw such a connection. What is it?
- m. In your opinion, does Jesus offer Himself as a model for the disciples, in the sense that the disciple should be able to wither fig trees like Jesus did? If not, what is the lesson? If so, how many fig trees have you blasted lately?
- n. Men rightly believe that Jesus never showed a mean, selfish spirit. Yet, how are we to understand this incident? Why did He curse the fig tree, if not because He was in a fit of frustrated anger because this tree did not furnish Him what He wanted?
- o. Was Jesus’ promise of moving mountains by faith intended for every disciple, or only for the Twelve? On what basis do you decide this?
- p. What limitations does Jesus place upon His seemingly universal promise to move mountains for any disciple who asks it of Him in faithful prayer?

- q. How does the text help us to understand what attitude we should have when we seek a supernatural (miraculous) blessing from God?
- r. In what sense is it true that Mark's additions concerning forgiveness (Mark 11:25) are implicitly included in Matthew's general statement, "Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith"?
- s. Affirm or deny and tell why: "The narration of the cursing of the fig tree in this context had the precise function of explaining the sterility of Judaism and of foretelling its proper destiny."

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Early on the day following the triumphal entry, as Jesus and His disciples were on their way back to the city from Bethany, He felt hungry. In the distance He noticed one solitary fig tree completely leafed out close to the road. So He went up to it to see if He could find anything on it. But when He arrived at the tree, He found nothing on it except leaves. In fact, it was not yet the season for figs.

Then He said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" May you never bear fruit again!" His disciples were listening. And the fig tree began at once to wither. Then they arrived in Jerusalem and He entered the temple and began to drive out the merchants. . . .

Early the next morning, as they took the same route as the previous day, they saw the fig tree now completely withered away from the roots up. Then Peter, recalling Jesus' words the day before, exclaimed, "Rabbi, look! That fig tree you cursed has dried up!" When the disciples saw it, they exclaimed in astonishment, "How fast it withered!"

"Have faith in God," Jesus urged them, "I can assure you that, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree. In fact, if you order even this mountain, "Go throw yourself into the sea," without any mental reservations or inward doubts, but believing that what you say will occur, it will be done for you. This is why I tell you that whatever you pray for, act on the assumption that it is already received, and it will be yours! Further, when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your heavenly Father may forgive you your sins."

And they came again into Jerusalem. . . .

## SUMMARY

Before cleansing a pretentious temple that served an equally pretentious nation not producing the fruit of righteousness that God the Creator rightly expected of both, Jesus transformed an otherwise commonplace situation into a grave object lesson full of warning. If a fruitless fig tree deserves to be blasted instantly, what fate must await an unbelieving, prayerless, merciless people that, despite all pretensions to the contrary, has made great promises without performance of that one great duty for which it was created, as surely as a fig tree was created to produce figs?!

## NOTES

## I. PUNISHMENT FROM GOD FOR HYPOCRISY AND BARRENNESS (21:18f.)

### A. The Sterile Fig Tree

21:18 **Now in the morning as he returned to the city, he hungered.** **In the morning** means "early" (*proi*), referring to the time of day, not necessarily, as in English, "the next day after today" (Greek; *epaurion*; cf. *proi skotias eti oules* of John 20:1: "early while it was yet dark"). Matthew affirms nothing about chronological sequences. This fact resolves any supposed contradiction between Matthew and Mark regarding the sequence of the events of this chapter. In fact, Mark clarifies the chronology by using the more precise time connection "on the following day" (*epaurion*) "tomorrow, the next day" (Arndt-Gingrich, 283). Thus, Matthew affirms only what time it was when Jesus cursed the tree, without saying on what day it occurred. Mark's chronology clearly notes that the cursing took place on the day after the Messianic Entry into Jerusalem, i.e. very early Monday morning.

**As he returned to the city**, then, shows that Jesus was coming from Bethany to Jerusalem to cleanse the temple, teach and heal, after spending the night there with the Twelve. (See notes on 12:17; Mark 11:11.) Apparently, He did this every day, since people got up early to hear Him (Luke 21:37f.).

**He hungered.** (See notes on 8:26.) As is evident from the sequence of events recorded by Mark (11:12-15), Jesus was leading the Twelve to the temple before breakfast. Apparently, He had not eaten in

Bethany before leaving, and so *was hungry*. Because skeptics find it incredible that hospitable people like Mary and Martha should have permitted Him to miss breakfast, we furnish several possible reasons why He might have done so:

1. Had He risen before the others, to go out to pray? (Cf. Mark 1:35.) Had they arisen later, eaten and then joined Him to go to Jerusalem? This would explain why no mention is made of the Apostles' hunger. Again, all 13 men might not have slept together in the one house of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, but in several homes in Bethany, or elsewhere.

Farrar (*Life*, 509, note 1) poses the interesting question whether Jesus really slept in the town of Bethany:

The *eulisthe ekei* of Matthew 21:17 does not *necessarily* imply that He bivouacked in the open air. It is, however, very probable that He did so; for (1) such is the proper meaning of the word (comp. Judg. 19:15, 20). (2) St. Luke says, *eulizeto eis tò òros tò kaloùmenon* (21:37). (3) It was His custom to resort for the night to Gethsemane, where, so far as we are aware, there was no house. (4) The retiring to Bethany would hardly answer to the *ekrùbe ap' autôn* of John 12:36.

He concludes that Jesus probably did not actually stay in the village since His purpose appears to have been concealment, which would hardly have been realized by retiring in the famous house where so many had observed Him at supper earlier. So, if He and the Apostles, slept on the slopes of Olivet near Bethany, the problem of breakfast is to be solved precisely like Jesus started to solve it, by finding it wherever He could.

2. Concern to go to the temple at an early hour to catch the traders at their game, may have pushed Him to leave Bethany before breakfast. Although Jesus enjoyed a good meal on many occasions (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:33f.) with Pharisees (Luke 14:1ff.) and publicans and sinners (Luke 15:1ff.), the pressure of His activities sometimes left Him little time to eat. (Cf. Mark 6:31.)

Let scoffers sneer at this hungry Messiah! For the believer, this characteristic evidences His authentic humanity. He is truly the Son of man and very much like His brethren in this basic physiological

need. And yet, side by side with this demonstration of Jesus' complete humanness, His hunger, we see His divine power in the instant withering of the fig tree by a simple word of divine might.

**21:19 And seeing a fig tree by the way side.** When Jesus first noticed it, it was at a distance (Mark 11:13), but, because it was close to the road (Matthew has: *epi tēs hodoû*), it practically invited the hungry passerby to sample its fruit. God Himself had already solved the ethical question whether anyone should pick fruit from others' trees without first asking permission (Deut. 23:24f.). In fact, after the first picking of fruit, anything remaining over must be left on the tree or in the field expressly for the alien, the fatherless and the widow (Deut. 24:19ff.).

**He came to it** "to see if He could find anything on it" (Mark 11:13). Apparently Jesus did not use His supernatural insight to learn at a distance whether there were fruit there or not. That He could choose not to know certain things should cause no surprise for anyone aware of His unique Sonship. Jesus, when He discovered the things He chose not to know in advance, could be surprised. (See notes on 8:10 and 24:36.) In fact, He approached the tree expecting to taste of the fruit which must surely be on it, since it was "in leaf" (Mark 11:13). It is a false assumption that "our Lord knew, as by His divine power He must, that there was no fruit upon that tree." By starting with this false premise, one must defend Jesus' apparent insincerity when He approached the tree, "playing like" He expected fruit, when, in reality, He knew there was none. On the other hand, substitute this premise with the alternative hypothesis that our Lord **CHOSE NOT TO KNOW** about the tree by supernatural knowledge, and any need to excuse His supposed "insincerity" is eliminated.

**He found nothing thereon, but leaves only.** Mark 11:13 adds the cryptic phrase: "for it was not the season for figs." In fact, Passover time is near the beginning of spring, whereas the normal "season for figs" is much later on in the summer. Note carefully that Mark relates that "He went to see if He could find ANYTHING (*ti*) on it."

1. Mark's statement that "it was not the season for figs" is obviously not included to suggest that Jesus' conduct was either immoral or irrational, as if Jesus blasted a tree incapable of producing what He (wrongly) expected of it. Mark should be treated as an intelligent, believing writer who could have discerned such an incongruity, had it really existed.

Ferrar (*Life*, 511), citing Josephus (*Wars*, III,10,8), suggested:

On the plains of Gennesaret Jesus must have been accustomed to see figs ripe on the trees every month of the year excepting January and February.

However, Mark's comment on the season renders invalid any hope of finding ripe figs on the tree, since Mark is discussing the growing season for the JERUSALEM area, of which he, quite possibly, was a native, (cf. Acts 12:12).

Rather, by using this expression, Mark shows that Jesus was NOT looking for ripe figs, matured that spring, but for something (*ti*) else. What was He seeking then?

2. Autumn figs from the previous year? Pliny's *Natural History*, 16, 27, describes these late fruits that not uncommonly continued on the trees throughout the winter, even till the arrival of the green leaves of spring. This possibility, however, is less likely than the following, because the tree's proximity to a large population center would have almost guaranteed that all winter figs would have probably been picked by passersby or blown off by the wind (cf. Rev. 6:13).
3. Jesus sought flower figs, the "first figs" or "green figs." (Study Isa. 28:4; Jer. 24:1-3; Hos. 9:10; Mic. 7:1; Nah. 3:12.) This "early fruit" is formed in the springtime (S. of Sol. 2:10-13). In reality, such young fruit is the blossom and appears before the leaves open.

The fruit is of so anomalous a construction that botanists have had to give it a distinct name and place among fruits. It is a hollow receptacle, with minute flowers on its inner side, which later produce the true fruit (*Davis Dictionary of the Bible*, 231).

Edersheim (*Life*, II, 374f.) reminds that the Mishnah (Shebh. iv.7) and the Talmud (Jer. Shebh. 35b, last lines) confirm the fact "that the unripe fruit was eaten, as soon as it began to assume a red color."

Jesus was hoping to find some flower-figs to eat. But as sure as the law: "no flowers, no fruit," He knew, as does any fig grower, that, because there were no flower-figs, there was also not going to be any fig production later on in August.

**Nothing but leaves.** Leaves were the signal to all that something edible should have been found on that tree. Jesus would not have even bothered, had it not been for that deceptive foliage announcing to any that know fig trees that something to stave off His hunger

was to be found there—if not old figs, at least edible, blossom figs. But to affirm, with McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 581), that “it was too early for leaves,” is to ignore the nature of that species of fig fully leafed out in precisely that locality in that year.

**And He said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again.”**

Mark’s expression “He answered and said to it” (Mark 11:14 *apokritheis eîpen autê*) may be nothing more than a typically Aramaic redundancy (Blass-Debrunner, §4, note 4) and should be left untranslated in English (Arndt-Gingrich, 93), being but a standard formula. Jesus is not, therefore, formally answering the supposed claims which the tree made by its leaves.

That Jesus should address a tree is no surprise to anyone who knows our God who can merely speak a word to His creation and things begin to occur (Gen. 1:22; 3:14). In fact, to see Jesus addressing a sea storm to quiet it, is to witness the same phenomenon. (See notes on 8:26.) The greater surprise is to hear Jesus attribute moral responsibility to the tree. Some object that to treat an impersonal object as something properly subject to punishment or reward is itself an injustice, an observation that causes many either to reject the account as unhistorical, or else reduce it to an entirely parabolic symbol. Three answers are possible:

1. The error lies in man’s failure to understand God’s creation. Morality, by God’s definition, is to function according to His design for our nature and in harmony with the purpose for which we were all created, be we trees or men. Not to do so is immoral and blameworthy. God’s will and design for trees is that each produce “fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds” (Gen. 1:11). Further, such fruit was to serve as man’s food (Gen. 1:29). Therefore, Jesus could justly impute guilt to a tree, however impersonal it might be, because its barrenness did not fulfil the law of its life by responding positively to God’s will that governs the tree’s nature.
2. Under what circumstances would it ever be considered criminal to eliminate a worthless tree?

For example, on what basis could the farmer, in the story of the unfruitful fig tree, be accused of malice or uncultured spite and impatience, when, disappointed by his fig tree’s uselessness, ordered it to be “cut down lest it continue to use up the soil” (Luke 13:7)?

If there is no such case, then should it be thought somehow MORE criminal to remove it by supernatural, rather than by natural, means?

3. Even those who complain about Jesus' attribution of moral responsibility to a tree are often caught doing a similar thing when they talk to inanimate objects, such as those choice remarks aimed at some object of their pleasure or displeasure, their comments addressed to their automobile when it refuses to start on a cold morning and they are late to work, their verbally coaxing a golf ball across the green and into the cup, etc. The difference is that, while they say such things without seriously believing their comments can change anything, Jesus not only said what He thought, but also radically proved His right to say it by changing the state of the object so addressed!

Further, to assume that the fig tree belonged to a local farmer and should not, therefore, have been presumptuously destroyed by Jesus, assumes more than the text affirms.

1. The observation that the tree was located "by the road" (21:19) argues that it was not located in a field, hence really belonged to nobody, was part of no one's patrimony. Jesus neither impoverished nor robbed any man, therefore.
2. Further, by reducing the barren fig tree to instant fireword, Jesus has done any presumed owner a favor, since the tree was good for nothing else.
3. BUT WHO IS THE REAL OWNER OF THAT TREE—and of every other tree on earth, if not Jesus the Lord? Can HE not do with HIS OWN what He wills?!

**Let there be no fruit from thee henceforward for ever.** Since He had found no flower-figs, He knew that there could be no future fruit-figs. He merely acknowledged that fig tree's condition as barren and, by His utterance, sealed that condition forever. Its time for fruit-bearing had passed. It had been found useless to God and man. Now its judgment and sentencing had come. Two reasons have been noticed that justify Jesus' judgment: the tree's fruitfulness and its falsity.

1. For fruitlessness, because it was contrary to its God-given nature.
2. For pretending, by means of its deceptive leaves, that it had already fulfilled its God-given mission in the world, i.e. to bear fruit. Its external expression was untrue to its inner life.

Jesus' reaction was no precipitous, pettish outburst, but a solemn judgment carefully announced and instantly carried out. If it be true that usefulness to God and men is the only justification for existence on earth, and if the function of justice is to eliminate anything or any person not fulfilling the end for which it was designed, then the justice of Jesus, in preparing this fig tree for removal, is fully justified.

Further, on the basis of Jesus' later explanations (21:20-22), are we to infer that His curse involved His own full confidence that God would execute what Jesus here simply addressed to the fig tree? Yes, because that demonstration of absolute trust which He requires of His followers is exemplified in His own total dependence upon and confidence in the Father at every point. He verbally withered the fig tree in the undivided certainty that it was God's will and that God's power could effect it.

**And immediately the fig tree withered away.** Matthew's abbreviated account conveys the impression that, even as they watched, the fig tree wilted. Mark's more definite account notes that "the fig tree withered away from its roots" (Mark 11:20). So Matthew is correct to affirm that the **tree withered away immediately**, since the withering began immediately at the roots, but the effect on the branches and leaves would not necessarily have been instantly evident as, in fact, it was the next day. **Immediately** (*parachrêma*), then, does not necessarily mean "in their presence while they were looking," but "relatively soon," since the antithesis of *immediately* would be the slow-motion decay of a degenerate tree.

### WHY DID JESUS WITHER JUST THIS ONE TREE?

Were there no other fruitless trees, plants, animals and even people all over Palestine, not to say, the entire world? If so, then why single out this one single fig for exemplary punishment for its fruitlessness?

On the principle of the parsimony of miracles, He probably would not have blasted more than this one encountered in the direct course of His earthly ministry. This differs not at all from His refusal to cure all the sick, raise all the dead or feed all the hungry in Palestine. He dealt with those He encountered and chose to bless; the rest He left. In His ministry it is not recorded that He ever encountered another similar fig tree out of which He chose to make a lesson on faith versus fruitlessness.

But, could He not simply have gone on to search for fruit on other trees? Or perhaps more wonderfully, He could have caused mature

figs to appear on this tree already so rich in leaves. He could have then eaten those. But He did not. Why?

1. He refused to use His divine power for selfish purposes, as during the temptations in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11).
2. Every object in God's universe occupies its place (1) by His grace and (2) for His glory (Col. 1:16f.). Nothing has an inalienable right to exist. Everything receives this privilege from the place it occupies in the order of nature. The day had come when this single fig tree must give final reckoning for its fulfilling the purpose for which God created it, fruitfulness. Consequently, Jesus did not violate the tree's nature by creating figs on it contrary to the will of the Father to whom He always gave Son-like obedience. Since the tree did not glorify God by properly fulfilling His purpose, its time of grace had elapsed.

### MYTH OR MIRACLE?

It is highly ironic that theologians and Bible commentators who work at explaining this perplexing incident in Christ's life, should prove the very truth of the Lord's teaching given in it! In fact, a neat cleavage separates them into two groups: those who believe that Jesus really withered a fig tree and those who, after all attempts at explaining the story in naturalistic terms, just do not really think it could have taken place. Barclay (*Matthew*, II,278) simply states:

We may well believe that Jesus used the lesson of a diseased and degenerate fig tree to say to the Jews—and to us—that uselessness invites disaster, and profession without practice is doomed. That is surely what this story means, for we cannot think of Jesus as literally and physically blasting a fig tree for failing to bear fruit at a season when fruit was impossible.

Others tend to consider Luke 13:6ff., the parable of the unfruitful fig, as so parallel in thought to the withering of the fig tree, that the miracle must be considered to be an "enacted parable." Radaelli (*Lettura di un miracolo come introduzione all'intendimento del miracolo*, 47,52f.) pontificates:

The account of a "parable" does not alter the content of the kerygma, i.e. it does not hinder the communication of a precise message *even if it is presented as a historical "event" because of*

*certain editorial concerns.* It is especially this nucleus of editorial aims that must be preserved, it is this teaching of faith that must be considered as primary and essential, *not its channel by which it comes to us.* We must learn what the Evangelist means by the narration of the miracle of the fig. *It does not interest us for now whether this narration is history or not.* (Emphasis added.)

For Radaelli it did not bother the conscience of Matthew or Mark to transform into a miracle what must originally have been but a parable, as in Luke. It makes little difference whether Jesus ever concretely withered the fig tree or not. The important thing is to learn the "truth" He intended to teach. Rather than reject the Evangelists' account as unhistorical or as intentional fabrication of facts simply because of some problems involved in a literal interpretation of the text, would it not be far more reasonable to argue that these "scandalous" problems, rather than furnish reasons for its rejection, are proof of its historicity? Matthew and Mark could have foreseen the difficulties, yet they included them. In fact, these problems evidence the scandal of Christ who smashes many human notions of what the Messiah "must" be, not merely for ancient Israel but for modern scholars too.

### IS THIS A MIRACLE OR A PARABLE?

Is there any basis in the text for thinking Jesus' cursing of the fig tree is an acted parable, intended by Jesus as an ominous warning to the fruitless Jewish nation soon to be destroyed for its barrenness? On whose authority may we confidently affirm that "the fig tree is a common metaphor for Israel"? None of the proof texts usually cited so affirm, since they often include other trees and vines as well. (Cf. Jer. 8:13; Ezek. 17:24; Mic. 7:1; Hos. 9:10, 16; 10:1, etc.) But granted that "fig tree" were a metaphor for "Israel" in every other context, what would make it so in THIS one? The following supposed parabolic parallels?

### PARABOLIC PARALLELS

1. The fig tree event is the literary framework within which the temple cleansing occurs. Can there have been no deliberate intention of the Lord to follow precisely this sequence? However, the Lord did not state His reasons for choosing this particular sequence of events.

2. Both the fig tree and the temple of Israel appear lacking in some way: figs on the tree, dignity and righteousness in the temple.
3. Both provoke in Jesus an energetic reaction that borders on violence.
4. Both were physically stricken and, after some time had passed, destroyed.

However convincing these parallels seem, it must be stated that Jesus did not turn His miracle into a parable. In fact, He said nothing in our text about the Jewish nation, city or temple. It is highly significant that, when questioned about the fig tree's sudden demise, He turned directly to the instruction of the Twelve about their own faith, prayer and forgiveness. Not one word came from Jesus' lips concerning a presumed parabolic significance of His miracle. The REAL LESSON Jesus considered far more urgent than talk about fruitless Israel was the lesson of the FAITH and PRAYER of His own disciples. THIS lies at the heart of all fruitlessness.

A sensitive Jewish reader would perhaps have intuited the following lessons:

1. The danger of spiritual sterility
2. The authority and power of the Lord who can wither a sterile tree by merely a word.
3. The operational value of faith to accomplish the impossible.
4. Would he have also specifically grasped the sterility of Judaism from this event alone? Perhaps from the context of the temple cleansing and the following debates and Jesus' condemnation of the leaders of Israel. In fact, in Jesus' larger context (21:33f.), He did discuss a people that did not "produce the fruits" of the Kingdom.

Our ability to see a parable here arises, therefore, not from something in the text at hand, but from our intuitive appreciation of His many lessons on fruitfulness and barrenness already given. (Cf. Matt. 3:10; Luke 13:6-9; see notes on "The Importance of Fruit-bearing" at the end of this volume.)

So it is MEN who turn this miracle into a parable by reflecting on its meaning. Their psychological process proceeds somewhat as follows: if Jesus can so rigorously curse a fruitless fig tree, what must be the destiny of a fruitless people who do not produce what their Creator expects. To every believer this must be a warning that guarantees the damnation of uselessness and the punishment of proud promises without performance. If God eliminates useless, unfruitful

creatures with a suddenness and severity that surprises the observer, and if He does it with indisputable justice because of the rich opportunities to produce what, by their nature, they could be expected to produce, **WHAT WILL HE DO WITH ME**, if I too do not produce what, according to **MY** nature, I am rightly expected to produce to His satisfaction?! (Cf. John 15:1-11.) But this conclusion is not really based on the parallel, but upon other revelations of Jesus given elsewhere. (Cf. Matt. 25:14-46, etc.) He said nothing directly about **OUR** fruitlessness in our text.

It is only on this basis that the incident's lessons find application in the life of Israel. Whereinsofar the Jewish nation of Jesus' day showed a rich profession of zeal toward God, even to the point of enthusiastically welcoming His Messiah, but did not produce the fruit God desired, just so far it would be condemned as worthless. While the cursing of the fig tree anticipates the clear teaching of three parables that describe the destiny of those among God's people who will not have done His will (21:38—22:14), and while this episode serves also to introduce Jesus' severe denunciation of the Pharisees (chap. 23), it is really out of men's analysis of Jesus' judgment and His rationale for it, that they derive this parabolic sense, not from something stated in the text.

### B. The Polluted Temple (21:12-17)

It is to be remembered that, at precisely this point (according to Mark's chronology), the Lord entered into His temple and cleaned out its ungodly traffic. In the estimation of many, this fact bears on the interpretation of the withering of the fig tree, as its perfect, necessary corollary, being also a scathing judgment upon a pretentious, but barren, religion. However, it is better to consider the cleansing of the temple as simply one more illustration of the principle implicit in the withering of the fig tree, rather than "a parabolic prophecy" of it.

## II. POWER FROM GOD THROUGH FAITH, PRAYER AND MERCY (21:20-22)

### A. The Disciples' Surprise (21:20; Mark 11:20f.)

21:20 **And when the disciples saw it**, a fully day had passed (Mark 11:19f.). Once again they are returning to Jerusalem from Bethany

where they had lodged the previous night (Matt. 21:17). Why did they not immediately notice the tree's withering?

1. If on the evening of the day the tree was cursed, they returned to Bethany by the same route as that taken in the morning, they may have passed the tree in the dark without noticing the change that had taken place in the tree either then withered or in its final stages of withering. Next day, they took the same trail and saw it by daylight.
2. McGarvey (*Evidences of Christianity*, 90) taught that

In Mark's account . . . the disciples are represented as not seeing the tree until the next morning after the curse was pronounced on it, although they went out to Bethany the next afternoon, and we should suppose that they passed by it (11:14, 19f.). This appears quite strange, if not unaccountable, until we inspect the route of travel between Jerusalem and Bethany, and find that there are two different paths, by either of which a person may pass up the western side of the Mount of Olives from one place to the other. One of the paths is very steep, while the other has a gradual slope. The steep path is the shorter of the two, and the one which a person would take naturally when coming down the mountainside toward the city, while the other would be naturally preferred by one going the other way. Now Jesus was coming into the city when He cursed the tree, and this accounts for the failure of the disciples to see it as they went out, and also for their seeing it when they came in the next morning. A coincidence so minute as this, and so artless, can be the work of none but an accurate writer.

**But the disciples saw it!** Brown, dry leaves stirring in the springtime breeze around the base of the now-bare, fruitless fig tree would catch their attention as it stood out in marked contrast to all that was green around it, as well as in contrast to its previously luxuriant foliage the previous day. They *saw it* and so become proof against modern skeptics who deny what they themselves did not see!

**They marvelled, saying, How did the fig tree immediately wither away?** A most remarkable reaction for Twelve men gifted with so many experiences of Jesus' divine power! How is such a response possible?

1. They marvelled, not because they had seen no miracles before, but because this was an unexpected evidence of His supernatural

power in a different sector of nature. Although they had witnessed countless wonders performed in the area of human sickness and death, demon-possession, in the forces of nature and some of its animal life, this was their first experiences with a miracle involving a tree.

2. Until now, Jesus' mighty works had been characterized by mercy and kindness. This one surprises the Twelve by the immediateness and completeness of the Lord's punitive judgment. Their reaction is entirely free from any criticism of His right to destroy the tree. Rather, they are astonished by the marvelous rapidity with which His curse is carried out.

**How did the fig tree immediately wither away?** (*pôs parachrêma exerânthe he sukê*) Most translators agree in rendering this Greek phrase as a question, implying the Twelve's desire to know the process. But did not they, of all people, already know that God could destroy the tree at the word of Jesus? Again, we must discern in what sense Jesus' response (21:21) really deals with their reaction. These can be understood in two ways:

1. **AS A QUESTION:** Disciples: "How did the tree wither?" Jesus: "By faith in God!" But must we suppose that the Twelve, who had apparently never before expressed any desire to know the inner workings of their Master's divine power, only now blurt out this impulsive question that delves into the mechanics of supernatural intervention? This is possible, even though His answer would be more indirect. "Have faith and doubt not" transfers their attention from idle curiosity about the physical mechanics of the supernatural to a proper emphasis on the spiritual connection with the power of GOD who makes such wonderful deeds possible. This shift of emphasis is evident when it is remembered that faith in itself does not directly produce a miracle. It is God Himself who does it. Faith is only the moral condition of His human agent or of the miracle's recipient. It may well be that Jesus intended NOT to answer the disciples question as they intended it, in order to remind them of their position as disciples and servants of God. Thus they had to leave the physical mechanics of supernatural intervention in His hands, while depending on His power to perform such wonders.
2. **AS AN EXCLAMATION:** Disciples: "How rapidly the tree withered!" Jesus: "By faith in God you too can do even more

marvelous things than this! Anyone who has faith can do that and more!"

a. An exclamation is grammatically possible:

(1) The question mark is not inspired, but a translator's choice interpretation.

(2) The Greek word order permits the phrase to be rendered as an exclamation.

(a) Compare the use of the interrogative adverb *pôs* rendered as a correlative adverb, making exclamations in passages like Mark 10:23f. = Luke 18:24; Luke 12:50; John 11:36. (Cf. Blass-Debrunner, §436, however, cf. §396 mentioned below; Arndt-Gingrich, 740, §3 article *pôs*; Rocci, 1634)

(b) Because *pôs* had begun to assume the function of *hoti* to introduce indirect discourse (Blass-Debrunner, §396, and Matt. 19:23 in contrast with Mark 10:23f.), our sentence could also be translated, "And seeing (it), the disciples marveled, saying, 'The fig tree withered suddenly!'" *Pôs* (= *hoti*) functions practically as quotation marks. But even so, the disciples' comments prove to be a series of exclamations, so the practical result is the same. (Cf. also Mark 11:21.)

b. An exclamation is at least as much in harmony with the disciples' astonishment as a question, if not more so.

c. Mark's parallel citation of Peter's words (Mark 11:21) contains exclamations: "Master, look! The fig-tree you cursed has withered!"

d. Several translators recognize the disciples' reaction as an exclamation, among whom the Berkeley Version by G. Verkuyl, the Twentieth Century New Testament and J. B. Phillips in English, and the Bibbia Concordia in Italian.

So rendered, the exclamation, which by its character still demands an explanation from Jesus, leads quite naturally into Jesus' explanation (21:21f.), since the disciples are no longer thought to be seeking that information which could have been drawn from their own rich experiences with the Lord. Rather, their astonishment (*ethaûmasan*) is based, not on inexplicable ignorance of Jesus' supernatural power, but on the mind-boggling rapidity (*pôs parachrema!* = "How swiftly!") with which His curse was carried out.

**B. The Lord's Lesson (21:21f.; Mark 11:22-25)**

1. "Unwavering confidence in God does achieve truly amazing results."

**21:21 If you have faith and doubt not.** The Lord now brings His men into fellowship with Him in His power by sharing with them the secret behind such marvelously instantaneous results. Rather than explain how He worked the miracle, drawing attention to the mechanics, rather than justify His severe judgment on the tree, drawing attention to Himself, Jesus turned the spotlight on the fundamental principle of confidence in God and dependence on Him as the source of all true power. "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22) beautifully summarizes Jesus' message and the basic goal of His ministry. He aimed to build faith in God among all who follow Him. He is not so much interested that we believe in the power of prayer as He is that we have faith in God who answers them, a confidence that trusts the power, wisdom and goodness of Him who can enable us to do the impossible instantly. He is so dedicated to producing real faith, that He expresses Himself here in the most vivid and encouraging language possible.

Further, because it was contextually JESUS' miracle that is the basis of His encouragement to believe God unwaveringly, may we not also infer that it was His own confident trust in the Father that stands at the base of His power? And did not the Father hear Him on many occasions precisely because of His reverent submission and His learned obedience? (Cf. Heb. 5:7ff.; John 4:34; 11:38ff.)

**You will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will be done.** Jesus argues from the lesser to the greater, inasmuch as cursing fig trees could be considered less impressive than ordering huge mountains around. In fact, physical removal of mountains is literally possible for a God who can do anything at the request of His believing children. And yet, how much actual rearranging of earth's geography is really intended by the Lord or understood by the Twelve? To understand Jesus' language as figurative is not to discount His words as unimportant. Even if He did not intend His men to understand Him literally, He did intend to be taken seriously! Rather, His words are proverbial for achieving what is humanly impossible. By saying *this mountain*, referring to the Mount of Olives on which they were then standing, He rendered this common proverb even more vivid.

If it be asked how the removal of figurative mountains could be psychologically superior to the stupendous miracle Jesus had just performed by blasting the fig tree, the answer is to be found in a later promise somewhat parallel in thought (John 14:12). His miracles were merely the scaffolding which supported His claims. But what is all-important for Jesus is the proclamation of His message throughout the world, because what actually saves men is this message, not His miracles. So, when His people would in faith move mountains of unbelief and hindrances by gospel proclamation all over the earth, thus making other believers in Him and saving them for eternity, this is far greater in His eyes.

Study Jesus' syntax: **You will not only do . . . to the fig tree, but even . . . to this mountain.** Both a cursing and a removing of impossible barriers would be within the province of believing disciples, a fact that has several ramifications:

1. There would be some negative, difficult work ahead for them. They would not find their discipleship unencumbered, but plagued by what cried out for cursing, and their progress hampered by difficulties to be removed.
2. Such a difficulty ministry could not be marked by presumptuous self-confidence nor by self-doubt and fear. Rather, all decisions they must make must occur within the larger context of faithful dependence upon God.

**If you have faith and doubt not:** how badly these men needed this admonition is illustrated by the failure of some of them to cast out a demon precisely because of their lack of faith and prayer. (See notes on Matt. 17:19f.; Mark 9:28f.) This unwavering faith in God was the absolutely essential condition which would connect them with the power of the living God.

Even if "moving mountains" is figurative rather than literal, this does not detract from the fact that these very disciples had already done tasks in harmony with God's will that would have proven impossible for doubters to perform, tasks just as impossible as causing a mountain to plunge suddenly into the sea. Peter had walked on the water by faith (Matt. 14:29). In Jesus' name the Twelve had conquered demons (Luke 10:17). Later these same men would plunge into a busy, miracle-filled ministry. (Acts 2:1-12, 43; 3:6-9; 5:12-16; 9:32-43; 19:11, 12, etc.) In fact, to believe that a handful of believers

belonging to an obscure people dominated by the super-power of Rome, yet without substantial economic resources, the assistance of diplomatic influence or military forces, could somehow change the direction of world history by the unique might of a preached message, is tantamount to believing that, with a single, simple gesture, a man could order a mountain to throw itself into the ocean!

## 2. "Trusting Prayer, Confident of God's Concern and Power, Is Sure To Be Answered" (21:22)

21:22 **And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.** Three major questions are involved in the correct understanding of this text:

1. To what extent should *all things whatever ye shall ask* be considered universal and to what extent limited?
2. If *believing*, and its parallel, "doubt not" (21:21), are the absolute minimum requirements limiting the apparently universal promise of Jesus, what, specifically, must be believed and not doubted?
3. When is it that *ye shall receive*? Must every believing prayer have an instantaneous, positive response from God?

Failure correctly to understand Jesus will lead to false expectations and consequent disappointments. Lest the unprepared disciple should be misled to think that "you can get anything—*anything* you ask for in prayer—if you believe," it is appropriate to study everything Jesus affirmed about proper praying, since His various statements furnish a context within which to comprehend these astonishingly unqualified promises in our text. (Cf. Matt. 6:5-15; 7:7-11; 6:19-34; 9:38; 17:20; 18:19f.)

1. Jesus will personally answer prayers addressed in His name (John 14:13f.). Since His name is the symbol for all that this name stands for, all that He had revealed about Himself, then only those prayers formulated in harmony with His self-revelation have any hope of an answer. His name is no magic formula tacked onto prayer to guarantee its being heard. "In His name" means "on the basis of HIS worthiness" and in harmony with His willingness to loan us the use of His good name.
2. Jesus will answer prayers "that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). No prayer can be considered that does not seek

God's glory. This desire to glorify the Father automatically screens out our unworthy, selfish requests. Since God decides by what standard His glory is truly enhanced, this implies that our praying must be in harmony with His will.

3. God will answer those who prove themselves to be friends of Jesus, a fact demonstrated by their obvious obedience to Him in their love for one another, their willingness to work together and in the abiding results of their lives (Matt. 18:19; John 15:12-17; I John 3:21f.).
4. God will answer the prayers that meet the scrutiny of Him whose personal intercession is absolutely essential to their being granted a hearing with God (John 16:23, "in my name"; I John 2:1; I Tim. 2:5). Obviously, such prayers must accord with the nature and will of Christ. Nevertheless, the believer is sure to be heard, if he prays for what Christ wants! To pray well, we must study HIM HIS goals, HIS desires, HIS methods, HIS intentions.
5. Jesus promises answer for those who are deeply and humbly conscious of their own limitations, their lack of wisdom, their sinfulness, their inability to foresee solutions, their need for knowledge and their need for an intercessor (Matt. 18:3f., 11; Rom. 8:26f.).
6. God will answer prayer according to His will (I John 5:14f.). When we learn to desire what He desires, nothing good will be withheld from us (Ps. 37:4). However God has limited His own freedom to grant just any and every prayer we pray. These limitations express His own character and program for world redemption. They also automatically restrict what we may reasonably expect from Him, no matter how trusting and free from doubt we think we are. God has deliberately stated His will in Scripture, so that we can learn both to pray and act aright. He will answer in harmony with all of these facets of His will that bear on the many, complex questions involved in any request we make:
  - a. God's will is knowable (Eph. 1:9; 3:2-6; 5:10, 17; 6:6; Col. 1:9; 4:12).
  - b. God's will is revealed only to humble disciples (Matt. 11:25f.).
  - c. God's will is grasped by mind-transforming self-sacrifice (Rom. 12:1, 2).
  - d. Scripture came by God's will (II Peter 1:21). Paul, for example, was an Apostle by God's will (Col. 1:1, 25-29) and what he writes is the Lord's will (I Cor. 14:37; I Thess. 2:13; Acts 20:27).
  - e. God's will is possible for man to do it (Acts 13:22, 36), although

difficult (Heb. 10:36). He even furnishes the gracious power to help us do it (Phil. 2:13; Heb. 13:20f.)! Even after Satan's victories (II Tim. 2:26)!

- f. God wants everyone to be saved (II Peter 3:9; I Tim. 2:4; Luke 12:32; Eph. 1:5). God wills that only Jesus deliver men (Gal. 1:3, 4; Acts 2:23; John 6:39f.) and He chose to save by means of the Gospel (I Cor. 1:21). He finds no pleasure in cowardly backsliders (Heb. 10:38). Spiritual kinship to Jesus is judged by obedience to God's will (Mark 3:35).
- g. God wills that we be thoroughly pure (I Thess. 4:3-8; Heb. 10:10; 12:14; John 17:15-19), sanctified by obedient faith (James 1:21f.; Heb. 11:6; 10:7, 10; I Peter 1:22-25). God hates sin (I Cor. 10:5).
- h. God wills that we live a full Christian life (Rom. 14:17f.), useful to others (Heb. 13:15f.).
- i. God wills that we show His same deep concern for the weakest (Matt. 18:14 in context). The body of Christ is also set up like He wants it, even with its weakest members to care for (I Cor. 12:18, 24-28).
- j. God's judgment is on the side of mercy for those who show mercy to others (Matt. 9:13; 5:7; 6:12, 14f.; 18:33, 35).
- k. God's will is the final arbiter for distributing His gifts (Heb. 2:4; Rom. 12:3-8; I Cor. 12:11).
- l. God may will that we suffer for Christ's sake (Phil. 1:29; I Peter 2:20; 3:17; 4:19). This may involve not giving us what would eliminate the suffering.
- m. God wills that we be thankful in all circumstances (I Thess. 5:18).
- n. God wills that we silence His opponents by our good life (I Peter 2:15; John 8:46).
- o. God wills that we love Him above all, and our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:28-33).
- p. God is pleased by Jesus and He becomes our example (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; I Peter 2:21-25). But He prayed, "Not my will but yours be done" (Matt. 26:39, 42). His goal must be ours (Heb. 10:7, 9; I Peter 4:1, 2).
- q. God wills to provide our every necessity, our daily bread (Matt. 6:11, 19-34; 10:29-31; Phil. 4:19; I Peter 5:7).
- r. God's will includes all creation (Rev. 4:11). In order to run an orderly universe, He may not choose to answer some of our prayers that require His creating disorder to do it.

- s. God detests this godless world and all it offers, all that is based on the appetites, greedy ambitions and all that men think glamorous (I John 2:15ff.).
- t. God's many-sided will may involve other principles as well. Consider these Old Testament expressions: Deut. 10:12ff.; I Sam. 15:22; Ps. 40:6-8; 50:7-23; 51:16ff.; 66:18; 69:30f.; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 1:15ff.; Jer. 7:21ff.; Hos. 4:1; 6:4-6; Amos 5:21ff.; Mic. 6:8.

The above texts lead inescapably to the conclusion that God will not give absolutely EVERYTHING that is asked for in prayer by the sincere believer.

Jesus does not mean that anyone may, without any basis in God's word, fancifully hope that God unquestioningly hand over anything His misguided disciple requests, merely on the basis of that disciple's ability to develop a psychological confidence that God will so act. This would reduce God to be the justifier of the unjustifiable gift, the automatic contributor to man's delinquency by mechanically conceding him everything he could develop enough psychological "faith" to convince himself God would give (cf. James 4:3). Our Lord offers no magical mechanism that justifies our expecting automatic blessing to be had just by praying.

Rather, Jesus refers to that faith that comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). We must believe the rich promises God has already given and frame our praying accordingly (II Peter 1:3f.). This faith must have an objective basis, not only in the truthfulness of God, but also in what He has actually said. We must also be prepared for God's negative responses. His refusal to take some of our prayers literally is far better than all we could have asked or imagined (Eph. 3:20; II Cor. 12:7-10). What if we mistakenly ask for a serpent instead of a fish, a stone instead of bread or a scorpion in place of an egg (cf. Luke 11:9-13; Matt. 7:7-11)? When we do not know how we ought to pray, we need the help of God's Spirit (Rom. 8:26). SHOULD we really receive what we pray for, in our ignorance *believing* it for our good, when to receive it would really harm us? It is a good thing that God does not answer some of our prayers! We must keep open alternatives to let God answer as HIS wisdom leads. This kind of believing trusts that what God has said, He really will bring to pass (Rom. 4:21). Consequently, we are not at liberty to expect or require of Him anything that He has not already indicated in His Word. In fact, it would be highly instructive to compare the few things

He has NOT promised with the foregoing list of things He HAS. But for anything He has committed Himself to, we may and must ask in full certainty (James 1:5-8).

Because of His faithfulness revealed in His Word, our confidence in Him leads us to depend upon His will. This persuasion is not that if we desire a thing ardently enough to pray about it, we shall surely have it. Rather, we believe that God's unlimited power guarantees His ability to answer our prayer, if our requests coincide with what He wills (I John 5:14f.). The faith required is our unshakable certainty of His perfect dominion over every element involved in the total answer to our prayer. But, if to us He is truly LORD, then HE decides, not we ourselves (Luke 17:5-10).

**Doubt not** (21:21) "in heart" (Mark 11:23), the reverse side of unconditional faith in God's promises, is the inability to move with certainty and decision by praying for and expecting what God committed Himself to deliver. *Doubt* considers as impossible, or at least uncertain, that what we pray for will actually occur (cf. Mark 9:22ff.). Despite God's promise to provide a certain thing to every Christian, the doubter is inwardly divided in that he both trusts and does not trust God to give it (cf. James 1:6-8). *Doubt* makes the distrustful person his own worst enemy in that it divides his basis of certainty at the very moment he must approach God with his whole heart. Because faith is the basis of man's communion with God, and because doubt divides man and weakens his confidence, doubt is naturally the sin that breaks communion with God. *Doubt* is hesitating when we ought to be acting confidently on questions God has already decided and announced in His Word.

Doubts are mental reservations. While we must have no mental reservations about anything God has said, they can certainly hinder our "believing that what you say will occur." We may be troubled by mental reservations about whether we should even ask Him to provide certain things:

1. How should we approach prayer for certain things about which we may have some doubts as to the true usefulness or value to us in our ministry to Him? Pray for wisdom, not easy answers (James 1:5ff.).
2. How should we ask concerning a choice we suspect to be forbidden in Scripture, but at the moment, remain uncertain whether we read it in the Bible or merely imagined it or were taught it by men? We must refuse to participate in it until our conscience is at rest,

assured by God's truth. (Cf. Rom. 14:23; I Cor. 8:1-7; John 7:16f.; 8:31f.)

3. Even if certain things have not been forbidden in Scripture, they may not have been specifically promised to all Christians. This may undermine our confidence and create mental reservations about asking for them.

If Jesus did not promise miraculous gifts to every Christian as an expression of the Holy Spirit's work in each one, can the modern Christian truly pray, without some mental reservation, for such gifts as supernatural inspiration to prophesy, power to heal others instantly or any other special gift? (Cf. Acts 9:40!)

4. We certainly should have mental reservations about putting God to unnecessary tests by our pleading that certain events under His undisputed control should occur, events which He has not promised to bring about. (Remember how Jesus handled Satan's quotation of Scripture promises of help for the godly! Matt. 4:6f.)

Jesus' presuppositions behind His dictum, then, are: after you have examined God's will to discern what He has actually promised to give you His child, after you have learned in what sense He intended His promises (good hermeneutics), after you are certain you have understood whether the specific promise in question applies to you personally and not to the whole Church in general or to special functionaries therein, THEN you can pray in full confidence that what you ask for is already yours, guaranteed by the faithfulness of a God who cannot lie to you.

1. This way the mental reservations based on ignorance of God's will are eliminated by knowledge. (Study Col. 1:9-12; Eph. 1:15-19; Phil. 1:9-11; 3:12-16, esp. 15.)
2. This way the mental reservations based on distrust of God are exposed for the unbelief they really are (Heb. 11:6).
3. This way no prayer will be prayed for things God has not promised in His Word.
4. But even before this, during it and thereafter, we have the Spirit's help with our ignorance and weakness (Rom. 8:26f.) as well as that of our High Priest, Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:25; 4:14ff.).

In short, Jesus is saying, "Believe what you pray! Do not ask God for what you do not yourself believe possible! Let your prayers reflect your true view of God!"

How peculiarly appropriate was this teaching of Jesus:

1. With regard to the disciples' immediate perplexities! Why Jesus should have claimed Messianic dignity so publicly and yet just as publicly refused to do what they expected an earthly Christ to do, must have seemed highly contradictory to them.
2. Contemporaneously, the fact that He did not precipitously turn such terrible power against the evil men of that day pointed to His deep mercy that furnished them opportunity to repent. As the disciples reflected later on Jesus' self-surrender to His enemies, they could have thought: "Why, He could have withered them as easily as He blasted that fig tree—with just a word!" This has a dual benefit:
  - a. It would tend to strengthen their faith in the face of the apparent triumph of evil. Jesus dramatically assured them of the infinite power which God could mobilize on behalf of His people any-time they asked for it believing.
  - b. To the extent they could appreciate the horrible firepower at His disposal but never used in His own self-defense, it would exalt His marvelous meekness and patience and the greatness of His grace. His meekness became their standard of behavior under fire. (Contrast Luke 9:54f.)
3. With regard to the great obstacles yet future! The blasted fig tree stood as a concrete symbol of God's power to remove the most formidable barriers ever to stand in their way. How exceedingly helpful must have been Jesus' promise to them as they remembered His words and lived in the confidence that everything needful to establish God's Kingdom was theirs by faith in a God who moves mountains that stand in the way! (Cf. Zech. 4:7.)

Had they had but eyes to see it, real faith in God had already marvelously moved mountains of doubt and fear from the disciples' minds, letting them see Jesus for what He really is.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what order does Matthew present his account of the cursing of the fig tree and of the cleansing of the temple?
2. In what sense does it seem that Matthew contradicts the testimony of Mark in regard to the order of events?
3. Furnish a plausible explanation that resolves the apparent contradiction between the two accounts.

4. What indications does Matthew furnish in his text that show that he knew he was reorganizing the order of the two events?
5. Where had Jesus been when He saw the fig tree?
6. Where was He going?
7. At what time of day did He see the fig tree?
8. According to Matthew, where precisely was the fig located?
9. What characteristics of the tree induced Jesus to approach it?
10. In what period of the year did this event occur?
11. Tell what you know about fig trees that assists in understanding this story.
12. With what words did Jesus curse the fig tree?
13. According to Matthew, what happened when Jesus pronounced the curse upon the tree?
14. According to Mark, when did they discover the effect produced in the fig tree by Jesus' words?
15. Explain why the disciples saw the effect of the cursing only at a later time, as Mark describes it. What elements in Mark's account suggest a rapid, but gradual, process involved in the withering?
16. What was the reaction of the disciples when they saw the effect of the cursing of the fig tree? Who voiced their reaction?
17. According to Jesus, what is the lesson to be learned from this event?
18. On what mountain were Jesus and His disciples standing when He spoke of moving "this mountain"?
19. Is there any basis for the assumption of many that Jesus' cursing of the fig tree is an acted parable intended by Jesus to refer to the fruitless Jewish nation soon to be destroyed for its barrenness? If so, what is that basis? If not, why not?

### SECTION 57:

#### JESUS MEETS CHALLENGES TO HIS AUTHORITY: THREE PARABLES OF WARNING

(Parallels: Mark 11:27—12:1; Luke 20:1-8)

TEXT: 21:23-32

#### A. Jesus' Authority Challenged

23 And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said,

By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

24 And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one question, which if ye tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or from men?

And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven, he will say unto us, Why then did ye not believe him? 26 But if we shall say, From men; we fear the multitude; for all hold John as a prophet. 27 And they answered Jesus, and said, We know not.

He also said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

### B. The Parable of the Two Sons

28 But what think ye? A man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in the vineyard. 29 And he answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented himself and went. 30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: but went not. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?

They say, The first.

Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye saw it, did not even repent yourselves afterward, that ye might believe him.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. On what quite reasonable basis could the religious authorities in Israel argue their right to challenge Jesus' authority to teach and act as He did?
- b. What is the fundamental assumption behind the religious authorities' challenge, the belief that motivates them personally to fling their challenge before Jesus?
- c. Since Jesus is challenged by the supreme religious authority in Israel, should He not respond respectfully by furnishing what they request, rather than by countering their question with another question? Is this not dodging the issue? If not, what is the real issue?

- d. How does Jesus' question about the baptism of John really deal with the main issue at stake in this situation?
- e. Do you think Jesus was concerned primarily, or, only, with the act of baptism as practiced by John, or do you think He included more of John's ministry as well? If you believe He intended more than the act of baptism, what else do you think He included? On what basis do you think this?
- f. What is the special moral rightness about Jesus' refusal to furnish credentials to these religious authorities?
- g. What is so specially sinful about the authorities' confessed indecision about John the Baptist?
- h. If men are to enter the kingdom of God on the same basis, how is it possible for some (like tax collectors and harlots) to be granted precedence over others (like chief priests and other authorities like them)?
- i. If faith must precede repentance, since one cannot change his mind about what he does not believe, how can Jesus expect the religious authorities, even after witnessing the conversion of publicans and harlots to "repent and believe (John)"? Why was this order necessary for them?
- j. What do you think would have been the reaction of common people who witnessed Jesus' treatment of the authorities? What would the people be able to see in the answer the authorities gave Jesus concerning His question about John the Baptist?
- k. What is the special value of a well-formed question in dealing with people in an antagonistic situation such as that faced by Jesus here? What may we learn from His use of questions as a method of teaching?
- l. What is the special value of a well-turned story with a decision-demanding question at the end, as illustrated in the parable of the two sons? Where else in the Scriptures do we find other highly effective stories constructed on this same pattern?
- m. How does this episode help us to understand God's basic plan of salvation?
- n. What does this text teach us about the redemption of the Jewish people: i.e. are they to be saved on a personal or on a national basis? Why do you answer as you do? Then, how does the text influence our understanding of the present place of Israel in the plan of God regarding the future.

- o. What does this section reveal about the nature of proof whereby a true prophet is to be tested and distinguished from a false one?
- p. How would you explain the religious leaders' rejection of John's ministry and message?
- q. How do you account for the religious leaders' inability to appreciate the conversion of the "sinners" in Jewish society? Should not the former have rejoiced and glorified God for this remarkable result obtained by John?
- s. In what ways is Jesus' story of the two sons here similar to His parable of the Prodigal Son and the Self-righteous Elder Brother (Luke 15:11-32)? Note that that story begins exactly as does this one: "There was a man who had TWO sons." What similarities and differences are discernible between them?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

On one of those days they arrived again in Jerusalem and He entered the temple courts. While He was walking around there, teaching the people and proclaiming God's word, the chief priests, the theologians and the councilors of the Jewish nation stepped up to Him as He was busy teaching, and demanded, "What right do you have to do what you do? Who authorized you to act this way?"

"And I too have a question for you, just one," replied Jesus. "If you tell me the answer, then I will also inform you as to what sort of authority I have for what I do. Tell me about John the Baptist: who sent him to immerse people—God or men? Answer me that!"

They began discussing it among themselves, arguing, "If we answer, 'God sent him,' He can retort, 'Then why did you reject his message?' On the other hand, if we say, 'He was acting on human motives,' we have the people to fear. Everyone will stone us to death, since they are convinced that John was really a prophet of God." So their answer to Jesus was: "We do not know who sent him."

"In that case," replied Jesus, "neither am I going to tell you by what sort of authority I do what I have done." He then began to tell them a series of illustrative stories: "What is your opinion about the following story? There was a certain man who had two sons. He approached the first and said, 'My boy, go work in the vineyard today.' But the boy answered, 'I don't want to!' Afterward, however, he regretted what he had said, and went. The father also went to the second and repeated the same thing to him. This son answered, 'Yes,

sir!' but did not go. Now, which of the two actually did what their father wanted?"

The authorities answered, "The first one."

"Right," continued Jesus, "and I can tell you this: crooks and prostitutes will get into God's kingdom ahead of you! You see, John came to YOU on a mission of righteousness, but you refused to believe him. However, the crooks and harlots did. And although you saw that, you did not even afterwards feel remorse enough to believe him."

## SUMMARY

While Jesus was teaching in the temple, the religious and political authorities challenged His right to act as He was. He silenced them by asking them a question He knew they could not answer without both incriminating themselves for their unbelief in the eyes of the people, and disqualifying themselves to ask for such credentials from Him. If they could not decide about John the Baptist whom all acknowledged to be a genuine prophet of God, on what ground could they be trusted to judge Jesus' credentials supporting His claim to come from God? Jesus then told the story of the two sons, one finally obedient although at first rebellious, and the other, apparently obedient, but really disobedient. These represent the Jewish hierarchy as only apparently obedient to God, while the more flagrant sinners who do what God wants are really so. Worse still, the hierarchy remained obstinately unmoved by this display of true piety. The Kingdom of God would be open to the flagrant sinners who repented, but closed to the respectable sinners whose moral condition blocked all repentance.

## NOTES

### I. THE AUTHORITIES ATTACK

**21:23 And when he entered the temple,** He had just come from Bethany (21:17, see notes). **Into the temple** means into the courts surrounding the sanctuary proper, not unlikely on the southeast side near Solomon's porch. (Cf. John 10:23ff.; Acts 3:11; 5:12.) Mark and Luke capture the setting of the hierarchy's attack which follows: He was surrounded by eager listeners to His doctrine.

**The chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him.** Both Mark and Luke note that "scribes" swelled the delegation. Since these three special groups may be distinguished from the whole council (Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66 as opposed to Mark 14:43, 53), it

would seem that this is a delegation and not the whole Council. However, that each major group is represented here gives added importance to the whole procedure. Even if a formal public resolution in the Sanhedrin to send an investigative committee were "entirely outside their recognized mode of procedure" (Edersheim, *Life*, 1,309), the fact that this was a privately organized, informal mission does not weaken its psychological effect. **The chief priests** were either members of the families of the high priest (cf. Acts 4:6), or priests responsible for special tasks involved in the temple worship. **The elders of the people** were laymen, representatives of the nation of Israel. The "scribes" (Luke 20:1) were influential rabbis or theologians. (Cf. Gamaliel, Acts 5:34ff.) As is clear from 21:45, this delegation is loaded with representatives from both major religious schools of thought, the Sadducees, in the person of the chief priests, and the Pharisees.

The attack came **as He was teaching**. The leaders were struggling separately to retain the prestige of their position and influence over the nation, but Jesus kept revealing and denouncing their wickedness. To break His hold on the popular mind (cf. Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47f.), they unleashed this subtle but dangerous attack while He was surrounded by adoring followers. The approach of these stately dignitaries may have been intended to communicate an impressive display of authority as they suddenly materialize (*epèstesan*, Luke 20:1) in order to achieve the maximum psychological effect of exposing this unblest provincial before the crowd as an illegitimate, self-proclaimed intruder. Since they themselves were afraid of the people (21:45f.), they probably hoped to stigmatize Him publically so as to deprive Him of His popularity and consequent protection. By this approach did they hope to stampede Him into some off-the-cuff rash admission?

**By what authority are you doing these things? and who gave you this authority?** This question implies three things:

1. That Jesus had in fact been doing something significant which they must formally investigate in this manner;
2. that these inquisitors themselves enjoyed the unquestionable right to demand to examine His credentials;
3. that nothing He had ever said or done indicated to them that God authenticated His mission, message or manners.

**These things**, although a vague charge, must include not only what they would have termed "pseudo-Messianic rabble-rousing," such as the Messianic entry into Jerusalem and His unceremonious temple-cleansing, but also the miracles He had performed in the temple.

The clear sight of the recently blind and the normal movement of those who had until but recently been crippled (Matt. 21:14f.) should answer their question for them, unless they dig up the discredited accusation of collusion with Beelzebul! (Cf. Matt. 12:22-45.) Their most recent objection to Him lay in His defending children who unquestionably attributed to Him titles of Messiahship. (See on 21:15.) Because the responsibility to judge false prophets and religious frauds was clearly theirs (*Sanhedrin* 1:5), their major complaint was His assuming the position of Teacher of the crowds without prior authorization by any of the recognized authorities in Israel. Certainly no priest, whose was the exclusive monopoly over temple affairs, had authorized the temple's cleansing. No recognized theologian had ordained Him to teach there or anywhere. Had some Roman allowed Him a puppet-governor's right to play the part of "Messianic King"? So, because Jesus was but a common Jew and no priest, they suspected He could claim neither the authority of Church or State for His presuming to assume the management of the temple and exercise royal authority.

But we must not suppose that jealousy for their position was the only motive driving these leaders to demand who He thought He was and who had authorized Him to behave so "imperiously." Most certainly involved is their concept of authority. In fact, authority to teach in Judaism was conveyed by the imposition of hands in a formal ceremony of ordination after the accurate communication of traditions. Edersheim (*Life*, II,381f.) taught that "there was no principle more firmly established by universal consent than that *authoritative* teaching required previous authorization." This lack of accreditation by the proper rabbis was precisely the point at which Jesus seemed to be most vulnerable (cf. John 7:15). Ironically, the principle of authority to which they must appeal for their own right to lead Israel eventually originated in Scripture. But the same Bible taught that a prophet must receive his authorization directly from God (Deut. 18:15-22) even without any other human recognition! (Cf. Amos 3:3-8; 7:12-15; Gal. 1:1, 12, 16f.; 2:6.)

**By what authority?** means "by what kind of (*pois*) authority?" The fundamental assumption behind this challenge is their absolute certainty that He did not enjoy God's authority, hence His activity must be accounted for on some other basis. (Contrast John 3:21) These learned rulers might have conceded liberty of opinion to any itinerate rabbi who wanted to express his views publicly, but not to

Jesus who subverted their system. His personal holiness and compassion (cf. Matt. 7:15-20), His incisive but notably untraditional teaching of the meaning of God's Word (cf. Matt. 7:29) and His unquestionably true miracles (cf. Deut. 18:21f.; II Cor. 12:12) and His harmony with other prophetic revelations (cf. Deut. 13:1ff.; Isa. 8:20; Jer. 26), meant completely nothing to them as credentials! (Study I Kings 22:24-28; Jer. 20:1-6; chap. 23.)

In the mind of His inquisitors, what alternatives lay open to Jesus? The audacity of His demeanor and that of His followers implied that He claimed royal Messianic authority. Now if He denied it, His followers would abandon Him for disappointing them. If He admitted it, the authorities could turn Him over to the Roman procurator for treason. Again, if He disclaimed all authority, His actions would then lack any rationale, and He would be exposed as a fool or, worse, as an imposter. If He remained mute, they could insinuate that His silence tacitly confessed the falsity of His pretenses. If He tried to claim that God had given Him this miraculous power and this authority to teach, they could twist His answer and charge Him with blasphemy (cf. John 5:17f.). Thus, their question was not primarily intended to protect the people of God against a potential imposter, but to lead Him into a fatal trap. Normally, their question would be quite understandable and entirely justifiable, because acceptance of what anyone teaches depends on the listener's evaluation of his authority to say what he does. Technically, their formal question is in order. So it is not with the formulation of their challenge that Jesus must quarrel, but with the insincerity He sees in their motivation.

## II. JESUS COUNTERATTACKS

“John's authority is indicative of mine” (21:24-27).

21:24 **And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one question which, if ye tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things.** With what unruffled calm and unparalleled presence of mind He reacts! Is this evidence of only supernatural insight, and not also the reflection of careful personal preparation to meet just such a demand? This question had already arisen in Jesus' ministry (John 2:18; 6:30; Matt. 12:38; 16:1). He had already furnished answers that would have satisfied the honest mind. Now He must deal with the other kind.

Although Jesus' counter-challenge takes the form of a question, He may literally have said to them, "And I will ask you for a statement." (*erotèso humàs kagò lògon héna*; cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 285 §2, article: *eperotào* and 312 §2, article *erotào*: "to ask for, request" taken together with *lògon*: "statement," *ibid.*, 478, article *lògos*, §1 *gamma*. However, Arndt-Gingrich render our text: "I will ask you a question." Lenski, *Matthew*, 828: "*Lògon héna* = 'just one matter' and no more.")

Jesus' reaction is not artful evasion, since answering one question with another was not unknown among the rabbis. Observe the wisdom of Jesus' technique evident here:

1. He who asks a question asks the favor of an answer, and so cannot refuse to concede a favor asked of him without exposing his own unfairness. Thus, the rulers who asked Jesus the courtesy of an answer, could not easily refuse Him the courtesy of an answer to just one question, especially when He clearly declared His willingness to meet their demands immediately thereafter. If they refuse to answer His, when He had asked them one, they cannot then complain of any injustice in His refusal.
2. He knew that their question presumed their right to ask for His credentials. But their presumption must not go unquestioned, and that publicly. Normally, no one would dare ask publicly recognized officials for those documents that validate their right to question all others. But, precisely because He knew that THESE men perverted righteousness by rejecting God's true messengers, He must show for all to see that these officials were totally unqualified as holy inquisitors, hence had nothing more than a pretended right to grill Him as they were. Yet, by promising them a proper answer to their question, He tacitly admitted their responsibility and consequent authority to challenge all would-be prophets and teachers, and to decide without fear or favor. While it is unquestionably true that we are not automatically obligated to answer everyone's questions merely because he asks—either because the answer is not his to know or because the question itself is wrongly framed or otherwise impossible to answer—nevertheless, Jesus was obligated to furnish prophetic credentials sooner or later.
3. His was no crude trick or evasive counterquestion, because, were they correctly to answer His question, they would have a solid basis upon which to appreciate the correct answer to their own. (See

on 21:25.) His, then, is a highly effective way of answering, since He stimulates them to answer their own question for themselves. The key to the main question often lies in the correct answer to a question that must be taken first.

4. JESUS HAD ALREADY ANSWERED THIS QUESTION BEFORE. How many times must a faithful witness give his testimony before his word is to be accepted as true (cf. Rev. 1:5)? Doubtlessly numerous investigating committees had poured out their reports before the Sanhedrin, quoting verbatim His replies to this same query answered on other occasions. (Cf. Matt. 12, esp. vv. 9-14, 23, 38ff.; 16:1-4; John 2:18ff.; 5:15-47; the special case of the man born blind, John 9:24-34; 10:24-39.) Jesus cannot be unaware that they are not honestly seeking information, since the chief priests and Pharisees had united the council in the determination to put Jesus to death (John 11:47-53). So, their question is anything but a legitimate, innocent, routine request of credentials.
5. There is a special, moral rightness that Jesus should refuse to furnish His credential to THESE men. To continue providing evidence of His divine authority, when adequate proof had already been given, is to place in doubt the adequacy of the foregoing proof as if it were somehow inconclusive.
6. There is real wisdom in a well-formed question when dealing with antagonistic people:
  - a. It immediately took the pressure off of Himself, since it demonstrated that He was in control of His own spirit and that He had sufficient presence of mind to meet their potentially devastating question with a reasonable reaction.
  - b. It shifted the pressure of His questioners: they became the questioned.
  - c. It immediately enlisted all interested bystanders in cooperating together to formulate the proper answer. Each one who answers the question would line up emotionally with those whose answer approximates his own. This very procedure transforms the former threat by reorganizing its components along new, potentially helpful lines.
  - d. It turns everyone's attention away from personalities immediately involved in the antagonism and toward resolving the issue. As in our case here, the question must not merely divert the attention from the one attacked, but toward the correct solution of the problem that occasioned the attack.

- e. Such a question may cause the antagonists to think, to be reasonable, to consider. Sometimes it may lead them to see the irrationality of their prejudices.
7. One decisive question leads people to take a stand. Those who face it honestly, but had simply been confused by their background, might be persuaded to understand their confusion and abandon it. Further, the authorities' confusion, exposed in this public way, would not go unnoticed by those who had followed their leadership. This, in turn, would stimulate the followers not only to repudiate their blind shepherds, but, having recognized their fallibility, examine God's Word personally.
  8. Prudence. To answer directly that He was the Messiah, God's Son, therefore qualified, would precipitate the final crisis at a time when there was yet much to be taught and done before the last hour. He refused to invite disaster by hurling Himself on the enemy's sword. As the Lamb of God in the midst of wolves, He was "as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16ff.), answering with great caution (cf. Prov. 15:28).

Whereas Jesus could have worked miracles to prove His right or perhaps cite Bible prophecies to support His claims, this time He adopted neither method of proof. Instead He lay before these schemers an unexpected, but fatal, dilemma:

**21:25 The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or from men?** Who sent John to immerse people—God or men? **The baptism of John** is metonymy for John's total mission of which his baptism was that act whereby those who accepted his mission from God demonstrated their submission to God. The baptism in itself would have held only a ritual importance for an Israel already accustomed to various washings and proselyte baptisms. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, II, 745-747; I, 273f.; see also Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 200f.; also Josephus' warped view, *Ant.*, XVIII, 5, 2.) But because John had so intimately linked it with repentance toward God and personal preparation for the coming Messianic Kingdom of God, there could be no rejecting it without, at the same time, refusing the God who had sent him to call the nation to repentance.

Why bring up **the baptism of John**? Several reasons account for this:

1. John's *baptism* is either an invention of men or required by God. Jesus left His questioners no loop-hole: the question of his *baptism*

is acid-clear, (1) because no Old Testament text had predicted or ordered it, (2) because no Jewish group, especially the Essenes and the community at Qumran, practiced anything precisely identical to it, and (3) because his baptism "for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) seemed to undermine the unique program for such forgiveness available through the right sacrifices by levitical priests in the temple.

Not even the Qumran community, with its multitudinous lustrations, thought of their admission of new converts to baptism in the same way John did. (Cf. John Allegrao, *The Dead Sea Scrolls—A Reappraisal*, 2nd ed. 1964, p. 121f.; Jean Danielou, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity*, 1958, p. 23). Josephus (*Wars*, II,8,2-13, esp. 7) says enigmatically, "[the proselyte to Essenism] is made a partaker of the waters of purification" which may mean initiation into the group or mere access to bathing regularly in the same water in common with "the pure." But Essene baptism is more a question of daily washings than initiatory preparation to fellowship in the community. That John's baptism was unique is eloquently evidenced even by Josephus whom some believe to have been an insider to Essenism, since he too describes John as "the Baptist." (Cf. his treatment of Essenism and other sects: *Ant.* XVIII,1,3-6; *Wars* II,8,2-13; and his *Life*, 2.)

The issue is this: was John right to introduce this rite?

2. Jesus, like John, had been sent directly by God, without human authorization from Jerusalem or from anywhere else. Standing outside the institutional structures of standard Judaism, and when challenged specifically on this point, John had claimed to be commissioned directly by God (John 1:33). Since the case of John and Jesus stand on the same footing, let the delegation decide about the former and they shall have their answer about the latter.
3. As observed before (see notes on 11:7, 14f.), the proper answer to the question, "Who is Jesus of Nazareth?" can be found in the correct answer to the other, "Who is John the Baptist?" For if it be determined that the latter is "a man sent from God" (John 1:6; Luke 3:2f.), and, consequently, his message and immersion as well, then his pointing out Jesus as God's Lamb (John 1:29), the One infinitely greater than John himself (John 1:27, 30), the One who has the Spirit (John 1:32f.), the Son of God (John 1:34),

should furnish the correct estimation of that authority by which Jesus ministered.

4. **The baptism of John** was objectively a previous revelation from God. Before Jesus will furnish new revelations of His identity, He must force them to face squarely the earlier ones, since openness to grasp new truth generally depends upon one's faithfulness and fairness in handling the previous truth.
5. In the mouth of these bigoted critics, the question, *Who gave you this authority?* means "What HUMAN authority?" since they presume the answer cannot be "God." If so, Jesus' reply really answers their challenge by saying: "John is God's messenger who prepared the way for me, baptized me and pointed me out to the world." In fact, it was at *the baptism of John* that Jesus was officially anointed to be a Prophet by the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:37f.) and proclaimed by the Father (John 5:32-36; 1:29-34).
6. Last, but not least, this was a question that even the simplest of the common people could AND DID answer to the satisfaction of God. (See notes on 21:31f.)

**From heaven or from men? From heaven?** is a respectful Hebraism meaning "From God" whose dwelling it is. (See notes on 23:22.) **From heaven or from men?** are the only alternatives (cf. Acts 5:38f.). The best, if not the only, escape from the horns of a dilemma is the formulation of a third alternative. But in this case there can be no third possibility, because, in the nature of the case, there are no other sources of prophetic inspiration. Even diabolic or drug-induced "inspiration" may be thought of as a subdivision of Jesus' expression "from men," inasmuch as these operate in deceived and deceptive men (cf. I Kings 22:22).

Although the leaders' question had been devious, because of its apparent interest in truth, Jesus' dilemma is a legitimate one that gets right at the heart of their deepest need and of that of His hearers. Because the rulers had scorned John's baptism and message, the Lord now requires that they openly confess it in the presence of the people they claimed to lead. If they declare themselves incompetent to decide John's case, they thereby disqualify themselves as judges of Jesus, but, even more critically, as master teachers of Israel. Since John had been a figure in Israel of such great religious significance, no one could ignore him without moral consequences. It was the duty of these authorities NOT to hedge or dodge the issue: John must be evaluated and that evaluation must be published.

If *they reasoned among themselves*, then how did the Evangelists learn the content of their deliberations? Probably the leaders talked in hoarse stage whispers in this on-the-spot consultation. Unless they deliberately retreated for a hasty conference, then it may not have been too difficult for by-standers to tune in on their debate.

**If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why then did ye not believe him?** Jesus knew that they did not believe John, but, if pushed by their answer to ask this question, He would have meant one of two things by it:

1. **Why did you not believe him** in what he said about your sins and need to repent so as to be ready for the coming Kingdom of God?
2. **Why did you not believe him** in his open and emphatic testimony to me, given before a priestly delegation from the Pharisees, that I am far greater than himself, even God's Son (John 1:19-34)?

With unerring insight born of calculating self-interest, these shrewd politicians recognized the political ramifications of their dilemma, and either way they are damned. To answer that John's message was really of divine origin but yet unbelieved by these very rulers, would instantly disqualify them as holy inquisitors in the name of God. To be exposed as crass unbelievers in a prophet of God at the very moment they are questioning Jesus' prerogatives to be just such a prophet, is to be totally disarmed for the task at which they should have been not merely legal experts but highly qualified morally. For anyone to admit that a given message or command is from God, and at the same time not to obey it, is the highest folly and deepest wickedness of which they can be accused.

**21:26 But if we shall say, From men; we fear the multitude.** The broken construction evident in their words is not proof of grammatical blundering on the part of the Gospel writer, but the accurate recording of the mental agitation of the holy inquisitors themselves! Here their true character is unmasked: rather than openly affirm their secret conviction that John was just another back-woods revivalist, but certainly not a prophet of God, rather than expose the decided judgment widely held by their colleagues in the Jewish Senate, they cower before public opinion. Luke (20:6) quotes them as fearing instant death by stoning at the hands of an aroused populace. *From men* had been their real choice made many months before, since they had examined John's testimony and had repudiated it (John 1:19ff.). They considered their rejection perfectly right-minded at

that time, because, in their view, John was self-sent. Now, under the psychological pressure of their own making, they hedge, because they cannot state their own true view publicly without political self-damage.

Another evaluation of their silence sees it as an unwitting admission that they recognized John as truly a God-sent prophet, for, it is argued, were they profoundly convinced they were right, there is no mob's fury they would not have braved, risking death to declare their convictions. Good evidence for this thesis are the Jews' many public demonstrations against Herodian or Roman policies, when they bared their breasts for Herod's vengeance or Roman slaughter, rather than submit meekly to compromise of conscience. (Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XIV,13,1,2; XV,8,1-4; XVIII,3,1; *Wars*, II,9.2-4.) This position, however, assumes these politicians would have had more conscience than they did. It also forgets their unwillingness to part with popular support which they desperately needed in their rickety power structure.

**We fear the multitude.** Their glaring sin was that they did not fear GOD! Who cares if God is offended or dishonored by their deliberate refusal to confess embarrassing truth? In full awareness of their options they lied because of their previous opposition to truth. For them, the main question was not truth, but personal consequences. They could not care less whether or not John were really a prophet. Their prime concern was what answer would most successfully and most immediately defuse the live bomb Jesus had just handed them. Although they claimed to have the interest of true religion at heart, these proud men are actually animated by the dictates of political survival.

The ground of their hesitation was the almost universal conviction that *John was a true prophet* (cf. Mark 11:32). Although dead at this time, John's influence over people was very much alive and even continued on into the age of the Church. (Acts 18:24ff.; 19:1ff.; Josephus' testimony: *Ant.* XVIII,5,2.) Ironically, the common people, whom the authorities despised (John 7:49), actually held truer conclusions than their leaders and expressed greater freedom and conscientiousness in expressing their true belief! Had the authorities maintained their personal integrity and obeyed God as His will was revealed by John, they too could have maintained their position as leaders and would have had no basis for their present uneasiness.

## CLUMSY EVASIVENESS

The reverend doctors solemnly intoned, "The point about which you ask is not one concerning which we are able to establish a scholarly consensus," which, stripped of its pompous language, translates into **21:27 We know not**. No one in Israel, called upon to give judgment about the ministry of a so-called "prophet" has the right to opt for this no-decision choice, since God had obligated all Israel to distinguish true prophets from false ones who lead His people into apostasy. (Cf. Deut. 13:1ff.; 18:9-22.) This shameful abdication of responsibility for a final judgment about John unquestionably ignores their God-given duty to know and decide. Further, it disqualifies them from asking credentials of ANYONE, for they would be as unable to judge the latter as they claimed in John's case.

**We know not** is a handy reply, because they believe no one on earth can disprove it, since it concerns their hidden thoughts. But a lie it was. They simply have no scruples about lying about their secret opinions. They merely hate the shame, not the sin, of deception. But even this deception is discovered, because the Lord did not react to their verbalized answer, **We know not**, but to their inward, suppressed answer, "We are not going to tell you," by saying, "**Neither will I tell you. . . .**" By so doing, He proved once more how rightly He read their inward thoughts which they feared to reveal. Ferrar's vivid evaluation of the situation (*Life*, 515) deserves repeating:

To say "We do not know," in this instance was a thing utterly alien to their habits, disgraceful to their discernment, a death-blow to their pretensions. It was ignorance in a sphere where ignorance was for them inexcusable. They, the appointed explainers of the Law—they, the accepted teachers of the people—they, the acknowledged monopolizers of Scriptural learning and oral tradition—and yet to be compelled, against their real convictions, to say, and that before the multitude, that they *could not tell* whether a man of immense and sacred influence—a man who acknowledged the Scriptures which they explained, and carried into practice the customs which they revered—was a divinely inspired messenger or a deluding imposter! Were the lines of demarcation, then, between the inspired prophet (*nahî*) and the wicked seducer (*mesîth*) so dubious and indistinct? It was a fearful humiliation, and one which they never either forgot or forgave!

## JUSTIFIABLE REFUSAL

**Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.** Their inability to pursue their question admits that their refusal to answer His questions cancels their own right to a reply from Him. However, although He was absolved from answering directly, as seen in what follows, He did not evade their question, because, in itself, it is a valid question worthy of a good answer. So He answered it parabolically. (See notes on 21:33—22:14, 41—46.)

**I do these things** echoes the wording of their question (21:23). However, He hereby also confirms that He is actually doing things that mark Him as the most significant spiritual phenomenon of the times. They could not formulate their original question: “By what right do you CLAIM to do these things?” because it was already painfully evident to them that the miracles, message and manners that characterized His ministry were incontestable facts.

Even though for the moment both Jesus and authorities are silent, their silence is for quite opposite reasons. Because of their cowardice, they CANNOT speak. Because of His justice, He WILL not speak. But the common people who witnessed the scene would have no doubt who had won. On the other hand, Plummer (*Matthew*, 294) suspects that at last in their own mind, Jesus’ enemies did actually gain headway in this round, since He did not publicly deny all claim to royal authority, in the same way He had been unwilling to hush the crowds (Luke 19:30f.) and the children (Matt. 21:15f.) who proclaimed Him their Messianic King. These refusals, when seen as tacit confessions, strengthened their case against Him both with the Romans and the Jewish Supreme Council.

### III. “DECIDE ON AN OBJECTIVE CASE: TWO SONS”

(21:28-32)

#### A. Rank Sinners and Religious Outcasts

21:28 **But what think ye?** Although Jesus had honorably and effectively bested His challengers psychologically, He is not satisfied to let them leave without help. Before they disperse, He presses them for further, possibly life-changing, decisions. **What think ye?** is His engaging way of eliciting their opinion. He invites them to THINK about a story that apparently has nothing to do either with their frustration and dishonorable failure in the face of His dilemma or

with His consequent refusal to submit to their pretended authority. This masterful approach defuses the tension by concentrating their attention on an interesting illustration. (Cf. 17:25; 18:12; 22:42.) The well-turned story has special value especially because of its decision-demanding question at the end. The Scripture records other highly effective illustrations built on his pattern (II Sam. 12:1-13; 14:1-24; I Kings 20:35-43; cf. Matt. 21:33-45).

**A man had two sons.** The *man* represents God; the *two sons* stand for (1) "the sinners," and (2) the hierarchy. The exquisite grace of Jesus pictures both as sons of the same father who tries to engage each son in useful work for Him. But there are only *two sons*, not three, as if there should have been another son who could both agree with and obey the father. Jesus omitted this concept, because there was simply no one who did that (cf. Rom. 3:10-23). **Go work today in the vineyard**, is the father's invitation to each boy to show himself a true and worthy son. The worthiness is not itself based upon HOW MUCH work each would eventually do, but upon WHETHER each would take up this precious invitation. This is the positive side of our obedience to the Father's will too. When Jesus applied this parable (vv. 31, 32), He identified those who please God and enter His Kingdom by pointing to flagrant sinners who believed His messenger and acted accordingly. Thus, the order to **go to work in the vineyard** is no mere merit system whereby each can earn so much praise for so much work, but

1. the practical procedure whereby people complete what the father needs done, and
2. the practical proof that each is truly the father's child, as he claims.

21:29 **And he answered and said, I will not.** The glaring disobedience the pious thought typical of publicans and harlots is not understated in this son's rude refusal: "I don't want to! (*ou thélo*)." Such an outrageous reaction springs from a rebellious heart that does not respect the father or fear the consequences. Such open, daring defiance illustrates an ungodliness almost proud of its rebellion.

Although not explicitly part of Jesus' story, He implies that the father did not instantly disinherit his boy because of this rebelliousness. He graciously left the son time to reconsider, and reconsider he did! This feature is perhaps intended to suggest how really typical of our Father not to want any to perish but all to come to repentance (II Peter 3:9; I Tim. 2:4; Matt. 18:10-14). This grace certainly leaves

the door open to what follows (cf. Rom. 2:4). **But afterward he repented himself.** *Metameletheis* might be better rendered: "he regretted it, or felt sorry for it." In fact this is not the normal New Testament word for repentance, *metanoéo*, which involves a change of mind and consequent action. In our text, it is true, the son actually did reverse his previous position by obeying the father, and the Jewish leaders should have done the same. (Cf. 21:32, *metemelèthete*.) However, Jesus' emphasis here is more on the remorse felt about previously bad conduct. A proper sorrow over reprehensible conduct can lead to genuine change (II Cor. 7:9-11), although this does not always happen, as in the case of Judas (Matt. 27:3). *Metamélomai* expresses primarily a change in feeling, not necessarily a change in conduct. This latter is to be discovered from the later actions which are the "fruits worthy of repentance" (*karpòn àxion tês metanoias*, cf. Matt. 3:8) John was really driving for. *He went*, thus showing himself a worthy child of his father, despite the bad beginnings.

### B. Religious Professionals

21:30 **And he came to the second**, to offer this son too the same gracious opportunity to show himself a true son. **And he answered and said, I go, sir:** the cultured politeness and ready acquiescence of this boy mark a stark contrast with his brother. He very respectfully called his father "sir" (*kùrie*)! The suddenness with which he responded is breath-taking and an excellent example for our response everytime God assigns us work to do. However, HIS *I go, sir*, is but the smooth lie of someone who is too cowardly to rebel against his father's authority openly. Or is it that habitual courteousness that responds well, but, unsupported by conscience, has no serious intention to carry through such glib commitments? How appropriately he symbolized the cultured theologians standing there before Jesus! **He went not.** Despite his politeness and promises, he completely ignored his commitment to the father. These very religionists did not merely promise to do God's will. They actually convinced themselves that they were doing it! In fact, they could have scraped together "scholarly" reasons why their investigation of Jesus was the will of God (cf. John 16:2). But that "they say and do not" would be one of Jesus' charges against the Pharisees later (23:3). This form of godliness of which they were inexplicably proud, proves to be the most effective tool Satan uses to resist the power of real godliness (cf. II Tim. 3:5). They

supposed that religious forms equalled the power of righteousness and could not discern that the power of righteousness EVIDENT IN THE GREAT CONVERSIONS OF FLAGRANT SINNERS is true religion at its best!

### C. The Punch Line

21:31 **Which of the two did the will of his father?** Despite the bad beginnings, who, in the final analysis, actually did what their father wanted? The crucial issue is DOING the will of God, not merely talking about it. This is true religion. (See notes on 6:10; 7:21; 9:13; 12:50; 28:20; Ps. 119; 143:10; John 15:14; Acts 5:29.) God is not so much interested in who said yes or no to Him at first, but who eventually responded in real obedience!

Without being obviously capricious, the authorities had to answer according to the justice of the case, whether they sensed the implications of His story or not. So, *they say, the first*. Anyone would prefer to deal with people who are better than their word—like the first son,—than with those who break it—like the second. And God Himself vindicates the justice of this choice in just such a case (Ezek. 18:21-28).

**Verily I say unto you.** . . . Since His opponents had taken sides on the moral principle in the story, Jesus now demonstrates how this principle applies to their situation. But perhaps no more shocking news faced these reverend clergymen than this: **The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.** If Jesus is right, this has to be bad news for these and anyone else who suppose themselves to possess the best chance to get into God's glorious Messianic Kingdom. In fact, from their point of view, for anyone to state that men and women whom all the pious consider hopelessly wicked, irretrievably damned sinners, shall enjoy precedence to enter into that realm where only the righteous justly deserve welcome, is to subvert all sense of justice and holiness, and irresponsibly to distribute unmerited hope to the undeserving! That is, unless there is a far higher principle of justice that completely vindicates it. And while the scowling dignitaries fume and sputter, Jesus' explanation is not long in coming (v. 32). He had already intimated this principle earlier: "There will be a surprising reversal of common judgments of right and propriety." (See on 19:30; 20:16.)

**The publicans and harlots** serve as the basis of Jesus' contrast, because they were common examples of shameless disobedience to God in Jewish society.

1. *Publicans*, or tax-gatherers, because of the extortion, graft and greed associated with this occupation, were considered classic sinners. (See notes on 9:9.) Nevertheless, John's preaching brought men like these to repentance (Luke 3:12f.).
2. *Harlots*, or prostitutes, because of their gross sexual immorality (cf. Luke 15:30; I Cor. 6:15f.), furnished another classical example of conscienceless unfaithfulness mixed with brazen impurity (cf. Rev. 17:1f.). However, Hebrew history provided the astonishing example of a harlot saved from certain death because of her trusting the God of Israel (Heb. 11:31; James 2:25; Joshua 2:1-21; 6:22-25). So, women too, not just men, found the door of the Kingdom open to them—and on the same basis. (Cf. Luke 7:36-50; John 4:7ff.; 11:1ff.; 12:1ff.; Gal. 3:28.)

But these are both mentioned not only because of their gross sins, but because they are also examples of discerning people. Even these gross sinners could discern what the leadership pretended not to know: John's baptism is from God and *the publicans and the harlots* openly confessed it. They proved that it was POSSIBLE TO KNOW.

What went wrong that made "the righteous" miss the Kingdom and "the sinners" go flocking right in? The greatest stumbling-block in true religion does not lie in its symbols and dogmas, but in its intolerably austere treatment of human pride. The man of taste and culture cannot imagine himself saying, "Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to thy cross I cling." This self-humiliating need for divine help—at least for HIM—is nonsense and highly offensive to his sense of moral accomplishment. This very aversion felt by men of taste was notably lacking in those *publicans and harlots* not so overawed by their own sense of self-importance. In fact, unsurprised that John should verbally blister them for living corrupt lives, nevertheless, they were strangely moved by his exhortations, because he convinced them that God's Kingdom was open to all who repented—even those whom others would have rejected as hopelessly beyond recall. But the self-righteous, respectable people whose very profession proclaimed their supposed readiness to serve God, failed at the one business they professed to do.

**The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.** A surprising turn is given to Jesus' word when *proågousin* is rendered "they are leading you," in the sense that they go before, leading the way as they precede those who follow. (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 708f.; Rocci, 1556.) Whereas the hierarchy considered itself amply qualified

to lead the procession of the righteous into Messiah's Kingdom, Jesus asserts that it is "the sinful people" who would do the leading! Submission to God's rule is the key to entrance into His Kingdom, regardless of the epoch in which one surrenders throne, scepter and crown of his own life and turns all over to Jesus as Sovereign Lord. Anyone who submitted to God's will preached by John—even if these all died before Pentecost—showed the spirit of obedience God seeks. TO DO WHAT GOD DESIRES IS TO UNDERSTAND THE KINGDOM, and those who act like loyal subjects are IN THE KINGDOM. They willingly submit to whatever the King decrees, and they do it as soon as His will is made clear to them. John the Baptist has made it real for *the publicans and the harlots* like it had never been brought home to them before. However, if Jesus is referring strictly to the Church as *the Kingdom* (cf. notes on 11:11ff.), He is indicating the direction evident in the lives of John's converts and the result they would soon obtain because of their present mind-set.

### THE WICKEDNESS OF UNBELIEF EXPOSED

Because this affirmation is so explosive, Jesus had better have some good reasons for it! Who could know for sure who has precedence in God's Kingdom? And who can prove on what basis he knows that much? However, for Jesus, the matter is cut and dried: 21:32 **For John came unto you in the way of righteousness.** It is because this fact is true that Jesus is able to affirm the precedence enjoyed by the "sinners" as opposed to the leaders, i.e. "they precede you into God's kingdom, a fact we know because John came to you in the way of righteousness and they believed him and you did not." Herein lies proof that John's ministry was from God: judge him by his fruits (Matt. 7:15-20). Even if you (falsely) claim not to know the source of John's inspiration, you MIGHT yet decide on the fruit of his work. While he did no miracle (John 10:41), the direction and results of his teaching coupled with his own personal example should tell you something meaningful about him:

1. **HIS CHARACTER:** John himself walked **in the way of righteousness**, a life of obedience to God's will. Can you find fault with that? The grosser sinners, usually keenest to discern pretense in the sanctimonious, detected nothing insincere about John's unvarying seriousness about righteousness. They found his piety convincing, genuine. Does not the fruit of righteousness evident in his own life give credence to his prophetic missions?

2. **HIS MINISTRY ITSELF:** Was John's doctrine of repentance and righteousness strange and new? Was it not rather that old, familiar, prophetic challenge to deeds, not words, and to real piety, not promises, characteristic of all Old Testament religion? Did he not teach you to fast, give alms and pray? (Luke 3:10-14; 11:1; Matt. 9:14f.) The high irony, then, is that when someone else came preaching the highest ideals of Jewish religion, its own leaders could not recognize it as from God, but haughtily spurned its lofty, spiritual demands (Luke 3:10-14)!
3. **HIS SUCCESS:** "The world's worst sinners," by your definition, were turning to God under his preaching! His marvelous success among the worst of people should indicate the Lord's blessing and approval of his efforts. (Cf. Paul's labors among similarly wicked Corinthians, I Cor. 6:9-11; 9:1, 2!) John brought people closer to repentance and to God than they had ever been, and yet the leadership of the nation could not discern in this any evidence of God's authorization?!

NOTE: Whereas this pragmatic test is not valid when considered alone, because temporary successes cannot guarantee final success with God, yet taken in context with the other tests mentioned, it becomes striking proof of John's validity. After all, had not the religious leaders tried without success to bring these very people to God, and had not they miserably failed? Now that it is well-known that John brought these very sinners to repentance, should not this prove SOMETHING about the validity of his approach? Still, numerical success alone is not a final test of rightness. Remember Noah! (I Peter 3:20)

**John came to YOU:** his mission had not excluded the Jewish rulers merely because his following came largely, if not exclusively, from the common people of the working class. **And ye believed him not.** It is significant that NOT ONE rabbi questioning Jesus raised his voice in protest. To the man they had all turned John down!

**But the publicans and the harlots believed him,** and although coming from a life of flagrant, open rebellion against God, moved by remorse for sin, they justified God's righteous judgment against their sins (Luke 7:29f.). They yielded to His claims on their lives, surrendered their sins, committed themselves to a life of obedience and moved right onto the way of righteousness.

**And ye, when ye saw it, did not even repent yourselves afterward.** What, according to Jesus, should they have discerned in John's

conversions, to be convinced to yield themselves too? If, by the hierarchy's own definitions, the publicans and harlots were the most hardened sinners and farthest from conversion to God and righteousness, and if John is actually drawing them into heart-felt repentance, surely the hand of God Himself must be upon this ministry! Out of this conclusion come some others:

1. The hierarchy should have clearly supported and encouraged the labors of the wilderness preacher.
2. Each member of the religious community should have personally and humbly submitted to his teaching.
3. And, if in the ministry of John they could thus discern God's direction and authority, they should have taken seriously what he said about Jesus as Messiah.

Ironically, they had simply written it all off as mere religious fervor and froth, suitable perhaps for the "truly sinful," but not a matter of concern for "the righteous," i.e. for themselves.

"*Afterward*, when there was ample time for serious reflection upon the amazing changes produced in the lives of formerly hardened sinners, *afterward*, in the quiet of theological reflection with abundant opportunity to re-examine the theological ramifications of John's position in the light of his results, you still did not feel sorry enough about your previous rejection to begin believing him." There was much in the leaders' life and theology that kept them from gladly joining the ranks of John's disciples:

1. Pride of position: they felt no need to regret their choice, as they were already righteous enough to enjoy the approval of God.
2. They suspected what they could not control. John had not been authorized by them, hence, however successful, they must regard him with suspicion.
3. John was stubbornly determined to help those whom the leadership despised and ignored as incorrigible and unworthy of further effort.

**You did not repent so that you could believe him** (*oudè metemelèthete hùsteron toû pisteúsai autô*). Note the order: repentance, or better, regret must precede faith in their case. They could not believe, because they were reluctant to regret their former choice, consequently they hardened themselves in their error. Until a radical change of sentiment occurred, until they repudiated their original blindness,

psychologically they would never bring themselves to believe John. In their state of heart, belief could never occur. Totally unlike the first son (21:29), they felt no heartache, no grief or sorrow at having disappointed their Father and God. What moral perversity it must take to mingle among the participants in the nation's greatest moral revival and remain totally unaffected by it, and worse, publicly disclaim all ability to discern its origin in God! What incontrovertible deafness not to be able to hear the familiar voice of the God of Israel in the accents of His wilderness preacher!

And yet there is no indication in Jesus' words that the gates of the Kingdom had been shut, or that these often unscrupulous religionists could not even yet reverse themselves. By not affirming, "But for you it is too late," He implies that there is yet time to repent. This same conclusion is assured by Jesus' use of the present tense: "The publicans and harlots are going ahead of you." Even if others had preceded the hierarchy, these could still follow their lead—if they really desired to do the Father's will.

Matthew Henry (V,306) is correct to see that Jesus' parable has far wider application than Jesus gave it that day, precisely because of the principles involved: "The Gentiles were *sometimes disobedient*, had been long so, children of disobedience, like the elder son (Titus 3:3f.), yet, when the gospel was preached to them, they became obedient to the faith; whereas the Jews who said, *I go, sir*, promised fair (Exod. 24:7; Josh. 24:24); yet went not. . . ." However, Jesus' illustration does not refer directly and primarily to the Jew-Gentile question, but to those two groups of Judaism, "the best" and "the worst."

This text has far-reaching ramifications for evangelism and eschatology too. How can anyone, contrary to this text, affirm that prior to the Lord's return all Israel will somehow sweep into the Kingdom of Christ by mass conversion? If, in the day of John and Jesus, Israel divided itself into two categories: believers and unbelievers, what could unite them but common trust in God's Christ without which it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6)? As long as modern Israel remains closed to open evangelism, what solid hope is there for their "end-times, sweeping conversion"? They must be led to repentance as anyone else who claims inability to believe.

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. According to Mark, where had Jesus been with His disciples when they arrived in the temple?
2. Who were the chief priests and elders? What is the significance of their coming to ask the question posed in our text?
3. In what activity was Jesus engaged when the authorities approached Him?
4. Furnish other incidents in Scripture where similar requests for credential were made (a) of Jesus and (b) of other God-sent prophets and apostles.
5. How did Jesus respond to the hierarchy's challenge to His authority?
6. Explain the importance of Jesus' question concerning John the Baptist and the origin of his baptism. What is meant by "from heaven" and "from men"? On what basis should anyone in Israel—its leadership especially—have been able to decide that John the Baptist was a true prophet?
7. How did the authorities react to the dilemma involved in Jesus' question about John's baptism? That is, what was the gist of their deliberations?
8. What was the final answer the hierarchy gave to Jesus' dilemma? Why did they give this particular answer?
9. What was Jesus' final answer to the authorities' challenge of His authority? Why did He answer as He did?
10. What story did Jesus tell to illustrate the moral situation in Israel represented by these religious authorities as opposed to others in Israel?
11. In what way were the two sons in Jesus' story precisely alike?
12. What fundamental difference distinguished the two sons?
13. Who or what is represented by (a) the father? (b) by each boy?
14. What is the crucial question Jesus asked to underline the fundamental lesson of His story?
15. Who or what in Jewish society were the "tax collectors and the harlots"?
16. In this text what does it mean "to go into the kingdom of God"?
17. On what basis does Jesus assert that the flagrant sinners would enjoy precedence over the religious leaders?
18. What is "the way of righteousness" wherein John had come to Israel? How does Jesus' affirmation state the divine source of John's authority?

19. When did the religious leaders see the conversions of publicans and harlots, which should have convinced them to submit themselves too?
20. What evidences of Jesus' divine majesty stand out in this incident?

## SECTION 57

### JESUS MEETS CHALLENGES TO HIS AUTHORITY: THREE PARABLES OF WARNING

TEXT: 21:33-46

#### C. The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen

33 Hear another parable: There was a man that was a householder, who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into another country. 34 And when the season of the fruits drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, to receive his fruits. 35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them in like manner. 37 But afterward he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. 38 But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance. 39 And they took him, and cast him forth out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures,  
The stone which the builders rejected,  
the same was made the head of the corner;  
This was from the Lord,  
And it is marvellous in our eyes?

43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. 44 And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces: but upon whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust.

45 And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables,

they perceived that he spake of them. 46 And when they sought to lay hold on him, they feared the multitudes, because they took him for a prophet.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Is this story a “parable” in the modern sense of the word, or an allegory? What other “parables” of Jesus help you to decide?
- b. On the basis of what elements in Jesus’ story could the religious authorities in Israel have correctly concluded that Jesus had told this parable against them?
- c. Why did not Jesus launch His accusations directly at the authorities, instead of hiding His intentions under the form of a parable? What advantage is there in the use of a parable, as compared with an open declaration? Is this cowardice?
- d. In what way does this parable reveal the larger plan of God for the world? That is, who is the owner of the vineyard? Who or what is the vineyard? What were the owner’s preparations for the positive development of the vineyard? In what sense did the owner go away from his vineyard? Who are the tenant farmers? What is the significance of the fact that they are tenants? When is the season of the fruit of this vineyard? When, or in what way, would the wicked farmers be punished? Who are the other tenant farmers to whom this vineyard would be entrusted after the failure of the first?
- e. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Psalm to convince His listeners of the rightness of what He was saying in the parable?
- f. Why should the meek and gentle Jesus predict the horrible destructions of everyone who goes against Him? Does not this ruin His image?
- g. The religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus, but they could not capture Him, because they feared the people who considered Him a prophet. What does this say about the depth and quality of these leaders’ convictions?
- h. Notwithstanding the well-merited punishment of the wicked tenant farmers suggested in the story, what evidence is there in the story itself that testifies to the long-suffering mercy shown them by the vineyard’s owner?
- i. Can you give a plausible reason why Jesus would leave the owner’s son dead in His parable? After all, whom does that son represent?

- j. In what way does this parable furnish the answer to the leaders' original challenge to Jesus' authority? ("By what authority do you do these things, and who gave you this authority?")
- k. Jesus pictures the owner of the vineyard as one who sincerely thinks that the tenant farmers could respect his son. On the basis of what factors could he hope this much, notwithstanding the ill-treatment suffered by all his previous agents? Although this element seems to be a weak point in Jesus' story, it could be one of His most meaningful points. Can you see what Jesus was driving at?
- l. In what sense could the Kingdom be taken away from anyone to give it to others? To what phrase or expression of the Kingdom is Jesus referring here? (Hint: in what sense had the Hebrews already known "the kingdom" before the coming of Christ?)
- m. In your opinion, what is the fruit of the Kingdom of God that the Owner of the vineyard expects from its new tenant farmers? (Clue: what was it that God desired for so many centuries from the people of Israel, but so rarely received?)
- n. Do you think Jesus was moved to tell this story because of the hierarchy's belligerent behavior on this occasion alone, or does it go deeper than that, i.e. does it spring from other situations also? Why do you think so?
- o. How many messengers of God have come to you to bring word from the owner of the universe? What did you do with them? How many more must come before
  - (1) you turn over to God all the fruit of your life that He expects?
  - (2) He comes to judge you for your handling of what He has intrusted to you?
  - (3) or He takes away your administration and gives it to others who will produce what He desires?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then Jesus began conversing with the other people in His audience, by narrating this illustration: "Listen to another story. Once upon a time there was a man, head of his house, who planted a vineyard. He fenced it round with a hedge. In it he dug a pit in which to stomp grapes, and constructed a watch tower. After renting it out to tenant farmers, he took a trip into a distant country for a long time.

"When the vintage time came around, he sent some of his slaves to the sharecroppers to collect from them his share of the grape

harvest. But those farm workers attacked his men and beat up one and sent him off empty-handed. They murdered another and drove a third with stones. Nevertheless, he kept it up. In fact, he sent other slaves, more numerous than the first group, but they treated them the same way. One they beat up, wounding him on the head, grossly insulted him and ran him off without collecting. Another they wounded, then killed him and heaved his body over the wall. Although the landowner persevered in sending them many others, they abused them all in the same way.

“As a last resort the owner of the vineyard had one man left, his own dear son. So he thought, ‘What am I to do now? I will send my own son: surely they will at least respect him!’ So, last of all, he sent his beloved son to them.

“But when those tenant farmers sighted the son coming, they plotted among themselves, ‘This fellow is the future owner. Come on, let’s kill him, so that what he inherits will be ours!’ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and murdered him. Now, when the vineyard’s owner comes, how do you think he will deal with those sharecroppers?”

Some of Jesus’ listeners responded, “He will come and give those wicked men a punishment their behavior deserves! Then he will lease his vineyard to other farm workers who will give him what he expects promptly—when they are supposed to!”

But other listeners, when they heard this, cried, “May that never happen!”

Nonetheless, Jesus looked them right in the face and demanded, “What does the Bible text (Psalm 118:22f.) mean when it says,

The very stone which the builders threw away  
has become the keystone.

This cornerstone came from the Lord  
and it is wonderful to see?

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but when it falls on anyone, it will grind him to powder. This is the reason why I can tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and awarded to a people that will really produce the fruits of the kingdom.”

When the theologians, the hierarchy and the Traditionalists heard His stories, they rightly understood that He was referring to them. They kept trying to get their hands on Him right then, but they feared the crowds, because the people considered Jesus to be a prophet.

## SUMMARY

Jesus' next story concerned a vineyard (= the Kingdom of God in Israel) for which its owner (= God) made every possible provision, hedge, wine press and tower. He turned it over to tenant farmers (= the Jewish leadership) to care for it and give him the returns he required (= righteousness). But at the harvest season (= the reckoning), when he sent his servants (= the prophets) to get his share, they were mistreated and murdered by the tenants (= the leadership). Last of all, the owner (= God) sent his own son (= Jesus), but he too, like the servants, was rejected and murdered, because the sharecroppers hoped thereby to guarantee his property for themselves. Jesus called for a judgment: what will this owner (= God) do to the tenants (= the Jewish leadership)? Some answered, "He'll give them the horrible death they deserve and turn the vineyard (= the Kingdom of God) over to another people (= Christians)." Others balk, "Never!" Jesus insisted that Psalm 118:22f. is going to come true: Through God's efforts the Rejected Stone will be exalted to great glory, but it will be the Stone that crushes all who attack it. The cowardly leadership recognized His meaning, but was impotent to muzzle Him, because they feared popular reprisals.

## NOTES

## IV. JESUS REVEALS GOD'S PROGRAM

## A. Bountiful Mercy (v. 33)

21:33 **Hear another parable:** were Jesus' attackers even that moment slithering toward the exit? If so, this invitation to hear another story blocks their escape by boldly announcing that the session is not over. Luke (20:9) informs us that, while not completely ignoring the sweaty-handed authorities, Jesus turned His direct attention specifically to the people. By eliciting a clear judgment from commoners concerning the criminal conduct of the vicious sharecroppers (v. 41), He showed that ANYONE could correctly evaluate and vindicate God's justice in punishing Israel's leaders, as He eventually would. By shifting His attention to the people, Jesus is not attacking the nation as a whole rather than its rulers. Rather, He lays bare the ruler's primary guilt and responsibility, and, by reflection, that of anyone else who agreed, in thought and behavior, with the nation's leaders. Sadly, of these there were many (John 1:11). In this sense, then, the whole nation is addressed in the person of its representative leadership (Hos. 4:6-9).

*Another parable* means that the story of the Two Sons is clearly a parable, even if Matthew does not so label it. But it is more than just *another*, since it carries forward the germ-ideas of the foregoing story and leads directly into the third. Compare them, noting the progression and intensity of thought as Jesus proceeds:

PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS	PARABLE OF WICKED HUSBANDMEN	PARABLE OF THE MARRIAGE FEAST
<p style="text-align: center;">Matt. 21:28-32 <b>OBEDIENCE</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work in the Father's Vineyard is offered to two classes of individuals.</li> <li>2. Stress is laid upon the leadership's rejection of John the Baptist despite good reasons to submit to him.</li> <li>3. Rejection of John the Baptist will cost rebels their entrance into God's Kingdom.</li> <li>4. God's permission to enter His Kingdom is not based on men's unfulfilled pious promises, but on obedience. This threatens all Jewish complacency grounded solely on empty pietism or carnal descent from Abraham.</li> <li>5. God's dealings are based on actual performance, not on empty promises. This could potentially justify Gentile participation in Kingdom.</li> <li>6. God's dealings are with individuals as evidenced in different treatment accorded the two sons of the same father.</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;">Matt. 21:33-46 <b>RESPONSIBILITY</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Care of the Owner's Vineyard is the basis of this story.</li> <li>2. Stress is laid upon Jewish rejection of all of God's prophets culminating in their assassination of His Son.</li> <li>3. Rejection of God's prophets and assassination of His Son will cost its perpetrators their lives and privileged position in God's Kingdom.</li> <li>4. God's dealing with Israel (Matt. 21:33-41a).             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. God's gracious provision for Israel's blessing (33f).</li> <li>b. Israel's ingratitude and rejection (35-39).</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. God's dealing with the Gentiles (21:41b-43).             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Punishment of Jews (40f)</li> <li>b. Blessing of Gentiles (41b-43)</li> </ol> </li> <li>6. God's dealings with other peoples are always based on "producing the fruits of" the Kingdom, something of which, in the final analysis, only individuals are capable. God's dealing with individuals is especially evident in this: "Everyone who falls . . . it falls on any one." (vv. 44; Luke 20:18)</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;">Matt. 22:1-14 <b>PRIVILEGE</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gracious opportunity to enjoy the King's bounty is the basis of this story.</li> <li>2. Stress is laid upon majority Jewish rejection of all of God's invitations given through His prophets, culminating in their killing them.</li> <li>3. Rejection of God's offers will cost impenitents their lives and the destruction of their city, while non-Hebrews will be admitted to the Kingdom's privileges.</li> <li>4. God's dealing with Israel (Matt. 22:2-7).             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. God's gracious provision for Israel's blessing (2-4)</li> <li>b. Israel's ingratitude and rejection (5, 6).</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. God's dealings with the Gentiles (22:8-10).             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Punishment of Jews (7)</li> <li>b. Blessing of Gentiles (8-10)</li> </ol> </li> <li>6. God's dealings with individual Christians (22:11-14) is always based on each's doing what God expected of him, i.e. wearing the wedding garment.</li> </ol>

Study this parable from three points of view: what it reveals about (1) God, (2) Man and (3) Jesus. This story borders on the apocalyptic in that it telescopes into one pithy illustration past, present and (then) future events in the history of the people of God, all expressed in symbols. We see their past rebelliousness and ingratitude, their (then) present unfaithfulness in refusing God's Christ and their punishment, if not also their final destruction.

**There was a man that was a householder, who planted a vineyard.** This introduction was well-calculated to stir interest, because, as A.B. Bruce (*P.H.C.*, XXIII,434) recognized,

At most this parable is but an old theme worked up with new variations. Every one who heard it knew what the vineyard with its hedge, winepress and tower signified, and who the vine-dressers were, and who the servants, sent for the fruits. These phrases belonged to the established religious dialect of Israel, as much as pastor, flock, lambs of the flock, Zion, etc. do to ours, used by us all without consciousness that we are speaking in figures.

Making use of this language, then, the Lord is not so much hiding His meaning under obscure allusions, as taking an old, well-known and well-loved story and giving it new meaning. In fact, His words quite closely echo the Septuagint version of Isaiah's celebrated allegory. (Isa. 5:1-7; cf. other parallel figures: Isa. 27:1-7; Ps. 80:7-19; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 15:1-6; 17:1-15; 19:10-14; Hos. 10:1.) Whereas the prophet's "Son of the Vineyard" emphasizes the quality of the vineyard's yield, Jesus' version gives importance to the sharecroppers' conduct. The pedagogical value of this procedure is unmistakable:

1. A well-known story with a new twist sparks the curiosity of the listener: "I have already heard a story similar to this, but where is He taking it?"
2. Further, Jesus assured Himself a sympathetic hearing, similar to that which Stephen enjoyed while he recounted significant points of Hebrew history (Acts 7).
3. While Jesus' detractors were even now accusing Him of standing outside the pale of Old Testament religion, He paints a canvas of Old Testament history showing His proper place in all that had occurred before His coming. At the same time, He left it beyond doubt that His appearance in Israel was the last, decisive act of

- God's patient graciousness and the beginning of His punitive justice.
4. By using the recognized authority of ancient Scripture against those opponents who questioned His personal authority, Jesus defended His own. That is, His story, even while not directly re-evoking Isaiah's, assumes as true the evidences of God's original creation of Israel's nation and religion. A true prophet must speak within the "prophetic context" of already well-authenticated divine revelations. (Cf. "How to Avoid Becoming a Pharisee" in my Vol. III, 375ff.) While Jesus does give a new twist to Isaiah's old parable, He does not contradict it. Rather, He extends it and grounds His own appearance in all that had preceded Him in the history of Jewish religion.

Jesus had already used a *householder* to represent God (20:1). There, as here, His purpose is to portray the goodness and patience of God toward self-righteous, highly privileged ingrates. Israel had forgotten that GOD OWNED THE VINEYARD. To appreciate the abundance of attentive effort God had expended upon the nation, note each specific step the vineyard's owner took to insure the success of his operation and guarantee fruit production. (Cf. Paul's list of Jewish distinctives: Rom. 3:2; 9:4f.) However, all these preparations produced the additional result of freeing the owner from blame in the event of controversy with the sharecroppers.

1. He *planted a vineyard* is tantamount to saying, "God created His people on earth, Israel." (Cf. Deut. 32:12-14; Ezek. 16:9-14; Isa. 27:2-6.)
  - a. And yet, since the *vineyard* is what is stripped from the unworthy tenants and given to others, it represents "the Kingdom of God" operative in Israel's national existence (21:43). It is that element that is common to both Jews and Christians, all that is involved in being God's private, personal, covenant people with the precious religious advantages and unique opportunities each is offered as a result of their election by God and because of His revelations to them.
  - b. Nevertheless, because the Kingdom of God must be subjectively realized in real people, if it is not to remain a purely theoretical idea on God's drawing board, Jesus is talking primarily about its historical actualization among the Jewish people. (See below on *husbandmen*.)

2. He *set a hedge around it* for its protection from being trampled or destroyed by stray animals (cf. Num. 22:24; S. of Sol. 2:15; Ps. 80:12f.; Isa. 5:5), not unlikely made of thorns (cf. Hos. 2:6) surrounding a stone wall (cf. Prov. 24:30f.). God had furnished every safeguard to assure Israel's national security. (Cf. Zech. 2:5; Isa. 4:5f.; 26:1; 60:18.) God had provided good laws, leaders and institutions to guarantee internal order and maintain Israel's separation from the paganizing influences of other nations (Num. 23:9; cf. Eph. 2:14).
3. He *dug a wine press in it*, i.e. carved out of natural rock a large vat-like hollow where fresh-picked clusters of grapes are stomped by workers. (Cf. Neh. 13:15; Isa. 16:8-10; 63:2f.; Jer. 25:30; 48:33; Lam. 1:15; Judg. 9:27.) because the winevat is the place where the true value and maturity of the vintage is expressed, allusion may be made here to God's provision to use the fruits of the nation: justice and righteousness, love, mercy and faithfulness. Not merely the altar of sacrifice in the temple is meant, but that service to God in every point in life where the strength and life-blood of God's people is poured out as an offering to Him.
4. He *built a tower*, probably a flat-topped farmhouse or farm building of any kind which could serve the double purpose of dwelling for the sharecroppers as well as a watchtower from which to guard the winery against theft or trespassing. (Cf. Job 27:18; Isa. 1:8.) Jerusalem with its temple was established in Israel as God's dwelling-place from which He could superintend and protect His vineyard. Its immediate care and control was in the hands of the priesthood and national leaders.
5. He *let it out to husbandmen*, i.e. farmers (*georgoi*), in this case "vinedressers" to cultivate and prune the grapevines, enriching the vines' production. (Cf. S. of Sol. 8:11f.; Isa. 7:23.) These were only tenant farmers, because the householder remains "owner of the vineyard" (v. 40) and merely *let it out to vinedressers* in exchange for "his part of the fruit" (v. 34; Mark 12:2; Luke 20:10) and because the sharecroppers later made their play to seize the only heir's inheritance to make it their own (v. 38). God did not leave Israel to its own devices, but established a clear chain of command for national leadership (Ezek. 34:2; Mal. 2:7). The *husbandmen* represent also the nation to the extent that it blindly followed its leaders (Jer. 5:31).

Maclaren (*P.H.C.*, XXIV, 521) preached that, although the Sanhedrin was doubtless the principle target of Jesus' story,

it merely reflected the national spirit. After all, who acquiesced to the influence of these leaders and conceded them freedom to rule? Further, if the share-croppers to be dispossessed are only the leaders of the nation, then those who replace them would naturally be only the leaders of the Christian church, a conclusion that would militate against the better view that both Jews and Gentiles, irrespective of their official ecclesiastical position, will be united in one new nation, a new Israel in the new theocracy.

6. Even the fact that he *went into another country* reveals that God intended to follow a "hands-off policy" with Israel, not constantly intervening in the everyday affairs of the nation, as if He were personally directing them (cf. Matt. 25:14f.; Luke 19:12). Rather, He chose to send prophets, agents through whom He would act. By so doing, He left Israel and its leaders relatively free to act, responding freely to His gracious love and blessing. Their choices, therefore, were their own. Historically, God had not communicated directly with Israel by speaking from heaven since the giving of the law during the birth of the nation. In fact, His establishing of the prophetic office grew out of that incident (Deut. 18:16f.).

### B. Mercy's Rights (21:34)

21:34 **The season of the fruits** would occur during the fifth vintage, since Mosaic legislation (Lev. 19:23ff.) forbade its use any sooner. In Palestine the big grape harvest usually occurs in late summer or early fall, although grapes in favored localities ripen also much earlier (*I.S.B.E.*, 3086b). Reasonably, the owner did not expect fruit nor demand payment before *the season of the fruits drew near*. This season does not refer to any definite period in Jewish history, because the very nature of the *fruits* involved required that Israel always be fruitful by sincere holiness and glad obedience, loving sacrifice and righteousness. (Study Mic. 6:8; Deut. 10:12-22; Ps. 40:6-8; 50:7-23; 51:16-19; 69:30f.; Isa. 1:11-17; Jer. 7:21ff.; Hos. 4:1; 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; I Sam. 15:22f.) If Jesus intends some specific deadline, He might mean that **EACH TIME** the vintage came round, the owner of the vineyard sent servants. The repeated missions of the servants is harmonious with this theory, in which case reference is made to the numerous, special missions of the prophets, special calls to repentance, new or particular guidance for Israel's moral development.

In Isaiah's parable, the owner "looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit . . . he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress" (Isa. 5:2, 7). Although in both Jesus' and Isaiah's parables the owner expected the good fruit for which the vineyard had been created, the reason he is frustrated differs only superficially. In fact, if Isaiah pictures his receiving bad grapes and Jesus implies he received none at all, the cause is essentially the same: the vineyard had become what the caretakers had made it (Isa. 3:14; 1:23). But God's concept of authority delegated to men requires that all superiors be responsible for creating the conditions in which their inferiors can succeed at the God-given tasks for which they were created. At every point the leadership of Israel is pictured as *husbandmen*: they have no inherent right or title to the nation. They are simply stewards under God, just caretakers, not lords. (Study Isa. 44:28; 56:10-12; Jer. 23:1-4; 6:3; 25:34-38; Ezek. 34; Mic. 5:4f.; Nah. 3:18; Zech. 10:3; 11:3-17.) Their acting the part of absolute owners accurately measures the depth and heinousness of their rebellion against God. So, the result is the same in both parables: the owner was not adequately repaid for his investment of time, effort and expense.

He rightly expected fruit, so *he sent his servants*, the last of whom was John the Baptist demanding the fruit of repentance and righteousness (Matt. 3:1-12). The various intervals between their missions are clearly indicated by Mark and Luke. This transparent reference to the prophets has apologetic significance, as Maclaren (*P.H.C.*, XXII, 504) shows. On a purely naturalistic basis there is no explaining why a people, so uniformly hostile towards the prophets, should have had prophets in almost continuous succession in every part of their long history. Courageous spokesmen such as these could not have been produced by this people nor by their sociological habitat, as their persecution and death at the hands of these very people proved. There can be no philosophy of Hebrew religion to account for this phenomenon, except Jesus' word: *he sent his servants*.

### C. Mercy Outraged (21:35)

21:35 **And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.** Perhaps they took this gentleman for just another absentee landlord too occupied with pursuits elsewhere to be seriously concerned with the affairs of the vineyard.

God too is treated with the same nonchalance, as a Supreme Being "out there somewhere," too busy with cosmic business to disturb Himself greatly about what occurs on this infinitesimal speck of dust lost in space, leaving its occupants free to act in any way their caprice suggests.

These sharecroppers were motivated to commit these bloody atrocities by the desire to keep all the vineyard's production and advantages for themselves. They apparently had no intention of ever paying the owner his part, that practical purpose for which the vineyard had originally been created and committed to their keeping. In the hands of the spiritual leaders of the nation had been placed a priceless heritage: a nation specially chosen by God and outfitted with excellent legislation, and destined to bring God praise through loving service. And yet these moral masters of Israel yielded to the upper-class temptation to consider only their private privileges and to trifle with duty. They commonly ignored the true, final purpose of Israel's high vocation and made little effort to prepare the nation to achieve it. They were habitually preoccupied with feathering their own nest, augmenting their own prestige and influence and their ability to manipulate others. No wonder the prophets, who goaded them to personal repentance and social justice, were considered trouble-makers, tolerated where possible or ruthlessly eliminated.

Although the nation reacted to God and His messengers in a manner consonant with its training by the leaders, the brutality characteristic of the treatment accorded God's prophets came from the leadership, especially from the sacerdotal aristocracy that claimed a monopoly on God's flock. (Study Matt. 5:12; Jer. 20:1f.; 26:11, 20-23; 37:15; Matt. 23:29-37 and parallels; Luke 13:33f.; I Thess. 2:15.)

Is *killed another and stoned another* a needless redundancy?

1. No, because not all stoning succeed in killing the victim. (Cf. Acts 14:19f.; II Cor. 11:25.)
2. No, by *killed* Jesus may have meant "assassinated"; by *stoned*, judicially murdered. (Cf. II Chron. 24:20f.)
3. No, by *killed* Jesus may mean "with a sword" (cf. I Kings 19:10) or some other weapon; by *stoned* He indicates the means in the verb.

Here is further explanation why the righteous suffer apparently endless torment by the wicked: it is in God's mercifully patient planning

to furnish the wicked apparently endless opportunities to repent before the final crisis.

#### D. Increased Guilt Vs. Incredible Patience (21:36)

21:36 **Again, he sent other servants more than the first.** (Jer. 25:4; 44:4-6; I Kings 22:24-28; II Kings 6:31; II Chron. 36:15f.; Neh. 9:26-34; Acts 7:51f.) Because each successive generation of Jewish leadership similarly outraged God's messengers, Jesus is justified in picturing the same group of sharecroppers as uniformly hostile. (See Jesus' argumentation in Matt. 23:29-32.) But a long-suffering God was patiently pleading with Israel to repent. God had no intention to indulge the nation's irresponsibility. His requirements were just, so they must meet them. Rather than close an eye to their slackness, their ignoring contracts, their claiming what belonged to Him and shedding innocent blood so as to retain their control, He constantly reminded them of a day of reckoning. They imagined they were getting away with their reprehensible behavior. But they had no sooner assassinated one of the prophets than another stood before them to warn that Israel would be answerable to the living God for it. Judgment would come: let the wicked forsake his way!

Incredibly, God sent prophet after prophet, but the wicked ran Elijah out of the country. One story has it that they sawed Isaiah in two. They dropped Jeremiah down into a muddy cistern. They murdered Zechariah in the temple near the altar. They chopped off the head of John the Baptist. Unquestionably, the patience shown by the parabolic landowner is practically unequalled in all human history. (If some of us had been God, we would have finished those wicked men the day they laid bloody hands on any one of these great and holy men!) So, in order to picture the Almighty's unbelievable long-suffering toward Israel, Jesus had to make up an incredible story to do it!

#### E. Mercy Resolute (21:37)

21:37 **But afterward** emphasizes the owner's last great attempt to bring the tenant farmers around to reason. This same point is vividly expressed by Luke's version: "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do?' because it depicts the final decision as the well-pondered, deliberate choice of the owner. Mark brings this into relief

by noting: "He had *still* one other, a beloved son; *finally* he sent him. . . ." This all serves to underscore the finality of Jesus' revelation of the Father who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all (Heb. 1:1ff.; Rom. 8:32). *He sent unto them his son*, not merely one more in a long line of faithful servants (Heb. 3:1-6; 1:1f.).

1. The readers of this Gospel would instantly recognize in Jesus Himself the allusion intended by "the beloved son" of the vineyard's owner, as the same language is used both at Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:17 = Mark 1:11 = Luke 3:22) and at His transfiguration (Matt. 17:5 = Mark 9:7).
2. For those who remember Jesus' claims to unique Sonship and can see God's prophets pictured in the owner's servants, Jesus is setting Himself above all of God's greatest spokesmen. He is claiming in the name of His Father the authority and title of Owner of everything in God's Kingdom! What an answer to the clergy's opening challenge to His authority! If they could but see it, they now have their answer: He is God's Son, empowered with all the authority of the Almighty.
3. And yet what better way could God plead with Israel's administrators than by picturing Himself as this father whose loving mercy reached an unbeatable high, when he placed his own beloved son at those who had brutalized his other agents?

The son stood in the place of the father, represented his authority and rights of ownership like no lesser servant could do. It should have been unthinkable not to give him the honor due his position (John 5:23). This touching but climactic move should have brought the vineyard's administrators back to their senses.

**They will reverence my son**, at first glance, would appear to be a gross blunder on the part of any human owner who had already lost many good men to the malice of his sharecroppers. He seemingly foresees only these two possible reactions: either they would actually submit to the Son's authority and produce the goods, or, if not personally submitting, they might at least hesitate to abuse him as they had the previous servants. But how could anyone in his right mind expect preferential treatment from such proven criminals? Some would conclude that, because this detail seems to deny the foreknowledge of God, we must not interpret it at all, leaving it as merely part of the vivid scenery of the story, picturing what a human landowner would do. But what landowner in real life would have

shown such resolute mercy? It just may be that this fact, precisely because it is so strikingly UNLIKE "normal" human conduct, is intended to draw attention to itself. In fact, Jesus is not talking about what men normally do, but about what GOD does. Parabolically, He pictures the history of God's dealings with an ungrateful people. **They will reverence my son**, then, expresses the last, longing hope of a longsuffering God. God is not ignorant of the final results of His plan to redeem man, yet He can still sincerely hope that everyone come to repentance toward Christ who would die for everyone, whether many of them appreciate it or not (II Peter 3:9; I Tim. 2:4; Rom. 11:32).

#### F. Mercy Mistaken for Weakness (21:38)

21:38 **But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance.** Because the *heir* would be the future owner, the present owner would have no one to whom to confer the vineyard as an *inheritance*. So the husbandmen assume that to kill the heir would open the way for the owner to consider simply abandoning to them that vineyard which had caused him so much grief. Their supposition is grossly unfounded for these reasons:

1. They suppose that the owner has no one else to whom to give the inheritance, no brother, no distant, long-lost kinsman whom he should prefer over them. *This is the heir*: they are confident there is no other who could arise to vindicate the son's death or question their seizure of the inheritance. *The heir* is therefore the owner's "only begotten son." Again, Jesus' uniqueness and finality receives emphasis in His teaching.
2. They suppose the owner cannot see through their duplicity or cannot know of their treachery. If only one of his servants returned to the owner bearing news of the treatment he suffered from them, they should have had every reason to fear and none for the confident talk they show here.
3. If they supposed they could merely *take his inheritance* by force, would they not have to reckon with the owner himself? Do they presume to think that HE could ignore that final affront, however patient he had shown himself previously with regard to his servants? Would he, too, simply and meekly lie down and die without ever once acting against them? They mistake his incredible patience for ineptness and indifference.

4. They suppose that if the present owner died heirless, their remaining in possession of the vineyard would guarantee their permanent ownership. "Possession is 9/10 of the law!"
5. They not unlikely suppose that the vineyard had already been deeded to the heir long before the father's death (cf. Luke 15:12). Since the owner had not appeared in a long time, perhaps he was dead too!

**Come let us kill him and take his inheritance.** For citizens of western countries endowed with excellent laws, good court systems and law enforcement, that anyone should dream by such monstrous rapacity to grab this choice real estate, would appear unthinkable. But this harsh reality is the status quo for any country plagued by bad rulers, greedy judges, apathetic citizenry and ineffective law enforcement. **Come let us kill him** is the decision already taken by the Sanhedrin (John 11:47-53, 57). Even if this murderous intent had not been widely advertised, it was indisputably an "open secret." (Cf. John 5:18; 7:1, 19, 25; 10:31-33.) His death is to be judicial murder, not the result of enflamed passions run amok. **His inheritance** is the Kingdom of God (see on "vineyard," v. 33, 43). By killing God's Son, the theologians and clergy hoped to make permanent their possession and control of God's Kingdom with its attendant privileges. Ironically, *the inheritance* already belonged to them, but by murdering God's Son, they lost it forever! They could have had a heavenly inheritance, had they but properly honored the Son (John 5:23). But the deadly influence of this earth's power, wealth and show appeared far more real and desirable. So they forfeited God's wealth by haughtily disdaining and savagely despising God's last, best offer, His Son. Whereas the Sanhedrists themselves would never have admitted Jesus were the true *heir*, hence, Son of God, because they denied His claims, they certainly plotted to silence Him, precisely because they saw Him as a prime menace to their political acquisitions (John 11:47-53).

Worse, they were so engrossed in a national religious system of externals that, when Jesus came insisting on a religion of the heart potentially open to every man willing to pay this price, they correctly understood that, if He won, they lost. Their stupidity lay in supposing that they could remain in power forever over God's people, even after the Mosaic system found its perfection and consequent end in the Messiah and His rule. Somehow, this was an option they had never considered. Sadly, they had no taste for what they could not control, nor for any system in which they commanded no special

privileges. Jesus menaced their monopoly on God. In this very parable He preached a faith for all men (v. 43) and in so doing, strips them of that national monopoly on which their religious, political and economic power was based.

One can be an enemy of God, while being in charge of the very heritage of God! (Cf. Ezek. 34:1-10; Zech. 11:3-17.) Their murderous conspiracy in the name of God (cf. John 16:1ff.) was animated, in the final analysis, by hatred for God (John 15:23). But the sin of the crucifixion began by refusal to pay God what they owed Him, it was cultivated by abusing His prophets and was matured in the murder of His Son.

Are the commentaries right in deciding that Jesus hereby implies that the rulers really knew His true nature and official dignity? Does their condemnation lie in the fact that, though they knew Him to be the Christ, they crucified Him anyway?

1. They may have only had a haunting suspicion that He merited more courteous treatment than they were giving Him, but simply would not let this doubt take root and blossom into fuller recognition of Him as God's Son. To what extent these hidden misgivings existed and persisted, creating inner self-contradictions, none but God knows.
2. But is it credible that these representatives of God CONSCIOUSLY fought against God? While resisting evidence that Jesus truly came from God, they still maintained their facade of shallow excuses they considered to be wisdom and sound policy.
3. To what extent did Nicodemus speak for himself or for his colleagues in the Sanhedrin (John 3:2, "we know")? Undoubtedly, as on every other issue, that council was divided, so a latent consciousness of Jesus' true identity as *the heir of God* may have nagged the conscience of some, but not necessarily all.

### G. Mercy Rejected (21:39)

21:39 **And they took him, and cast him forth out of the vineyard, and killed him.** Commentators, noting that Mark reverses the order: "They took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard," whereas Matthew and Luke place the killing outside the vineyard, conclude that the latter two have rewritten Jesus' original version of the story (Mark's) to suit their editorial needs. Accordingly, Luke, because of his "theology of Jerusalem," and Matthew, because he

remembered where the crucifixion actually occurred, supposedly re-arranged Jesus' words. To this two answers are possible:

1. This detail has no significance beyond the general fact that the heir was murdered. Whether in or out of the vineyard is immaterial.
2. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 784, note 742) suggested a better treatment of Mark's "reversed" order, by arguing that Matthew and Luke provide the proper historical sequence, whereas the second Gospel editorializes to show the climax: "They killed him, and this in the most shameful manner, casting him out of the vineyard as an accursed one." He rightly affirms that the difference of treatment could not easily have been produced by posterior theological treatment, because each Gospel writer testifies to the Lord's crucifixion on Calvary outside the Jerusalem city wall. (Matt. 27:31ff.; = Mark 15:20ff.; = Luke 23:26ff.)

If the authorities have been following Jesus' story up to this point, applying it to Israel and its leadership, they can discern His implication that God would send His Son. They could also remember Jesus' claims to be that Son (cf. John 5:17f.; 10:22-39). In effect, Jesus' illustration serves notice to the clergy that He understands their conspiracy to eliminate Him. Even while addressing the very men whose vote in the Hebrew Senate would seal His death warrant, He strangely declines any interest in resisting them to save Himself. Rather, He presents the case before the crowds whose common sense pronounces the condemnation of the Passover plotters. No pathetic fool or hesitant martyr Jesus! He fully understood what He was getting into when He deliberately walked into the clutches of these lawyers. Better than anyone else, He sensed that there could be only one conclusion to His final showdown in the final inquisition: DEATH.

**They cast him forth out of the vineyard and killed him** is said to prove that *the vineyard* could not be Israel, since this would mean that Jesus was pictured as being crucified outside Israel. However, the picture is theologically correct, since, when Israel in the Old Testament was encamped together, to slay someone or something "outside the camp" was equal to slaying them "outside of Israel." This is the sense of Paul's language in Hebrews 13:12 "outside the gate" and Hebrews 13:13 "outside the camp" where the two phrases are rendered practically equivalent. If *the vineyard* stands for "the Kingdom" (v. 43), Jesus' rejection and His crucifixion as a common criminal is in line

with the clergy's authorized view of Israel and the Kingdom. So, from their point of view, He should have been excommunicated from Israel and the Kingdom.

If it be objected that the behavior affirmed of the vinedressers is highly improbable or contrary to all probability, is it any less natural or more unreasonable than the unbelief it is intended to depict?

#### H. Mercy Finally Ended (21:40)

21:40 **When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come, what will he do unto those husbandmen?** In Isaiah's parable, too, God called Israel to judge whether the vineyard owner's efforts were adequately compensated by the results obtained therefrom (Isa. 5:3f.). But Jesus' emphasis is not now on the merciful provision for the vineyard's successful production, as in Isaiah. He assumes that **ANYONE COULD KNOW** that *the lord of the vineyard* must do something about *the husbandmen*. There can be no question whether he should, because common justice would require that he act decisively in this deteriorated situation. And when this moment of truth occurs, he who comes will not be another servant, but *the lord of the vineyard*. (Cf. 20:8 where the same high title is used.) The only question for His audience is *what will he do?* Now the erudite scholars of the nation are under double pressure both from the battering of Jesus' questions and logic as well as from the common judgment of ordinary people. They had avoided Jesus' first question, claiming not to be able to return an answer (21:27). They could not continue to affirm: "We do not know."

As in 21:31, so also here is another situation where the listeners unconsciously indict themselves by giving their verdict on the conduct of a story's characters. (Cf. I Kings 20:39ff.; II Sam. 12:1ff.; Isa. 5:3.) With quiet mastery the Lord drew them into judgment and led them unwittingly to confess their guilt and state their punishment by an angry God. Man's own sense of justice amply establishes the rightness of God's procedure and sentence. It is one of the ironies of our mind that we can easily and accurately foresee the horrible end of others' maliciousness, without, at the same time, discerning the terrible punishment deserved by our own identical sins.

If the leadership followed Jesus' story closely up to this point, as it parallels Isaiah's famous song, they could begin to feel the smashing

impact of this question. However, it is also true that precise identification of every element in His illustration may have been much easier in retrospect than at the moment of His punch-line question.

### I. Mercy Offered to Others (21:41)

21:41 **They say unto him:** just who answered is not clear, whether crowd or leaders. (Cf. Luke 20:9.) Mark and Luke bypass Jesus' waiting for an answer and quote these words at His own. In fact, the Lord may have solemnly repeated their words, syllable, for maximum moral and emotional impact on the leaders. Even if they foresaw His point, there was no escape, because, unless they were to be deliberately capricious and risk losing further credibility with the crowds, they must now answer according to justice in the vain hope that Jesus' application would not damage their cause further. Either way, by a brilliant story He had led them personally to declare that conclusion to which He wanted them to arrive: their own self-condemnation.

**He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons.** Conscious or not, their sentence not only damns themselves, but becomes a completely unintended, but true, prophecy of the wrath of God rained upon Jerusalem, a prediction of the beginning of Gentile Christianity and of the satisfying effectiveness of the church of Christ. For all their pretended right to rule Israel, these sham overlords stood weaponless before a justly angry God whose infinite patience had guaranteed them every fair opportunity for self-condemnation and atonement. In fact, the very multiplicity of their opportunities to know and do better rendered absolute the certainty of this death sentence they pronounce. (Cf. Luke 12:47f.) None can complain that he was not provided sufficient motive or occasion for repentance. In fact, their innate sense of justice, evident in the tone of certainty with which they pronounce judgment, compels them to confess their verdict of punishment perfectly just.

Because Jesus accepted this answer, we learn that the coming of the **Lord of the vineyard** would mean the destruction of the wicked tenants. His coming would also signal the beginning of a new lease on the vineyard by other husbandmen. This parable does not picture the end of the world, because it refers to a striking turning point in the affairs of the vineyard, hence the (then) future affairs of the Kingdom the vineyard represents. If so, then, we must search in the

history of Israel for that tragic turning point in the affairs of the Jewish people when their unique possession of the oracles of God and their unique place as the people of God came to an abrupt, horrible end. It must also be a period of history when it becomes abundantly clear that another group of people has inherited that responsibility that had belonged to the Jews, i.e. the task of representing and revealing God to the world, the responsibility of being a people for God in the world. (Cf. fuller notes on "The Coming of the Son of Man" in my Vol. II, pp. 439-441.)

**He will . . . let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits.** Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 291) notes eloquently that

God's sternest judgment is when He takes out of our hands the task which He meant us to do. A man has sunk to his lowest level when he has become useless to God.

Gentile Christianity, however, has now become a distinct possibility, if Jesus pursues this to its logical conclusion. (See special study at the end of this volume: "The Participation of Gentiles in the Messianic Kingdom.) Even if each arrives thereat by slightly differing routes, Jesus' point is essentially the same as Isaiah's: those unique privileges enjoyed by Israel pre-eminently above all other people, God would strip from them, leaving Israel at the level of their neighbors, the Gentiles (Isa. 5:5f.).

### J. Mercy's Victory (21:42)

To the shocked listeners, stunned by the inevitable but equally inconceivable conclusion (v. 41), Jesus now addresses Himself directly, looking them square in the eye (Luke 20:17). Was it a look of compassion and grief at their stupidity? Or was He searching for some evidence that they were softening? Or was He simply facing them down? Now they must have not only the inexorable logic of their own righteous sentence just pronounced by themselves, but also the Biblical justification of its rightness. *Did you never read in the Scriptures?* Jesus intends to demonstrate not only that the nation's chiefs were guilty of obstinacy toward God by turning a deaf ear to John the Baptist, but also that they were inexplicably insensitive to the very Bible of which they were the official expositors and which they claimed to protect by opposing Him.

Why, however, did Jesus quote Psalm 118:22f. as support? Any or all of the following suggestions may explain His intention. (Study how Peter made use of this same Psalm before the gathered council of Israel, Acts 4:11, and in his own writing, I Peter 2:7.)

1. He used this Psalm because it was fresh in people's mind, since the crowds had sung its "Hosannas" in His honor just two days before. (21:9 = Mark 11:9f.; Matt. 21:15.) Further, this Psalm's cryptic passage about the "Rejected Cornerstone" required an explanation that pointed out its fulfillment. In fact, the nation's leadership's proud refusal of God's Anointed and the common people's praise for Him is strikingly described in five CONSECUTIVE verses (Ps. 118:22-26).
2. Jesus cited this Psalm because it emphasizes once again God's flair for utilizing despised, unimpressive instruments to produce the most marvelous results. (See notes on 21:16.) Is Jesus despicable and unimpressive in the hierarchy's judgment? And yet can anyone do the miracles He does, unless God be with Him? Is His message spectacularly unmilitaristic and unsupportive of nationalistic Zealotism? Is His love for children, social outcasts and others without prestige in the social pyramid reminiscent of God's tenderness toward them? Are there ANY Messianic prophecies that point to this kind of Christ, even if other predictions seem to justify militaristic or materialistic expectations? If so, reconsider His claims!
3. He cited this Psalm to answer whatever mental reservations anyone entertained about the unquestionable rightness of the punitive justice meted out upon the vineyard's former caretakers. His citation completely refutes the astonished "May it never happen!" of those who considered it inconceivable (Luke 20:16). The Psalm endorsed the just sentence handed down by Jesus' listeners.
4. He cited this Psalm to show that God had known all along about Messiah's rejection by Israel's rabbinate, and that human blindness and perversity could not sidetrack God's program. Rather, by citing it, Jesus furnished a basis for unshaken confidence in Him even at the critical hours of His passion, since God's Word had foretold it and Jesus proved He personally foresaw and approved it. His suffering would be no accidental martyrdom, but a deliberate act carefully orchestrated by God.
5. He cited this Psalm, because, if the situation was as He described it, they had no suitable alternative interpretation of its words

(Luke 20:17). "What then is this that is written?" He could and must say.

6. He cited this Psalm in order to change the figure of the vineyard and the murdered son of the owner, because this figure does not tell the whole story. Admittedly, He might have narrated the son's resurrection, but it would have perhaps seemed to do violence to the story. However, a "Rejected Cornerstone" can be exalted to a glorious position. So, in essence, Jesus desired to imply the permanent victory of the slain son. In fact, how could *the stone which the builders rejected* (the slain son) *be made head of the corner*, if its function in the divine plan could somehow be thwarted by the permanent defeat of death? So, resurrection is implied.

Although this Psalm changes the figure from the responsible care of a vineyard to the constructing of a building, the central thought is the same: those responsible for the leadership of Israel would reject God's Messiah. (Paul, too, used both metaphors together: I Cor. 3:9.) Further, the Psalm has the added advantage of being parabolic:

1. *The stone . . . rejected* is the suffering Servant of Jahweh, the Messiah. Even if the Psalm's early singers could not discern all this, meditation on its meaning should have caused them to reflect on their sensitivity to ANYTHING God would do that would be missed or rejected through dullness, insensitivity or neglect. They had better have unassailable reasons for refusing anything or anyone claiming to be sent by God! They might commit the unpardonable mistake of rejecting the Stone laid by the Lord! *The stone rejected* finds its parallel in the rejected Son.
2. *The builders* are Israel's leaders, responsible to build up God's true Temple, God's Kingdom. Their rejecting the cornerstone implies that they were ignoring the architect's masterplan. Otherwise, would they not have seen its proper place in the blueprint? Consequently, the Psalmist foresaw that Israel's administrators would be attempting to build God's Kingdom according to their own concepts which had no place for that one odd-shaped stone, so they rejected it. The construction crew in this second figure is as unskilled as the tenants were short-sighted and wicked in that, even though the constructors claim to know how to build, they are nonetheless unable to discern the proper place for the most important Stone in this edifice! The hierarchy's blundering theories about how God's temple and Kingdom had to be, showed no place

for God's Son! These incompetents did not recognize the very Stone essential to their construction when they were standing there looking at it! So far were they from God's plans (Matt. 15:3-9 = Mark 7:6-9, 13).

3. *The stone . . . was made the head of the corner* where two major parts of the construction came together and to which the cornerstone, or keystone, gives solidity and permanence. Thus, what had seemed an odd, badly-cut, untrued stone was discovered to be not only most properly fitted but unquestionably essential to give stability, permanence and glory to the structure, to the embarrassment of the "expert" builders who had so confidently excluded it. Its importance and place in the building was gloriously vindicated. In fact, a *cornerstone*, to be one, must possess characteristics different from those common stones used elsewhere. And should not the Messiah, the Keystone in God's edifice, be different from the run-of-the-mill, politico-military chiefs at the head of the world's typical governments (Eph. 2:19-22)? The total vindication of the Stone's importance by its elevation to a position of honor finds its parallel in the swift and complete vindication of the vineyard owner's claims by his eviction and execution of the share-croppers, and by their replacement by more trustworthy tenants. In both cases this surprising reversal brings shame to those who refused the owner's plans. Jesus' death and dismissal by the nation's governors did not get rid of Him. Ironically, it fashioned Him for the very function He was to serve in God's plan, as perfect sacrifice and self-sacrificing High Priest. (Cf. Heb. 4:14—5:10; 7:15-28; 9:11-28.)
4. *This was from the Lord* after all. Who else but the Lord God could turn human rejection into the very means to arrive at His stated goals?! The Almighty God will not be hindered by apparent defeat due to the dullness of the human instruments with which He has chosen to work. In fact, when God would later succeed in elevating the Rejected Stone to its proper place in the construction, it would prove that He was still on His throne. *This was from the Lord* God who "exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:9f.).
5. *And it is marvelous in our eyes*. Here is the stupendous surprise and pleasure of the godly observers who exult over the unexpected, but nevertheless magnificent, final result of the Lord's course of action and workmanship, and they glorify Him for it. To the redeemed. . .

- a. It is *marvelous* that the Father should have singled out His only Son to be crushed in the incarnation, or that He should give Him victory out of death, or that He should establish His Kingdom on this basis so as to include former pagans and Hebrews, or that He should bless us with marvelous progress throughout human society everywhere by world evangelism.
- b. It is *marvelous* that the manger-born, crucified Nazarene, whom men despised, should, in reality, turn out to be none other than the reflection of the Father's brilliance, the Owner of the worlds, the Lord of angels, Maker of men and adored by kings (cf. Isa. 52:14f.).
- c. It is *marvelous* that our Lord should choose such unlikely methods to reach His goals and that ONLY THESE achieve them! Who would have thought that, by ordinary, patient teaching of concepts foreign to people's habitual tendencies, political methods and social doctrines, He could have accomplished so much?
- d. Our marveling is no less great when, by contrast to God's glorious results, we must also marvel at human stupidity that would have so long rejected the Stone or that should continue to be so biased against its own highest good.

But the degree of marveling by the saints is the degree of shock and embarrassment these theologians must have felt when, at the final siege of Jerusalem, it became abundantly clear that God had abandoned them. It measures the depth of their ignorance of the will and ways of God and underscores their gross lack of qualification to represent Him. (Cf. Acts 13:27; I Cor. 2:6-8.)

### K. The Reading of the Sentence (21:43)

21:43 **Therefore I say unto you:** Jesus hurled their own sentence back in their face with terrific force. It must be asked in what sense the Israelites possessed the Kingdom of God, and in what sense *it shall be taken away from (them) and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*

1. *The kingdom of God* is the vineyard of Jesus' story, God's provision for carrying out His will on earth through a well-defined group of people, in the first case, Israel. All His revelations and providence were calculated to prepare this people for the climax

of His great self-revelation in Christ, the King who would establish *the Kingdom of God* (cf. Col. 1:13f.). The Lord means *kingdom of God* in the sense of "the privilege to be the unique people of God on earth, acknowledging His dominion and enjoying His special revelations, protection and care." This privilege, with the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, was offered to "you and your children and to all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39). Later Peter documented the fulfilment of Jesus' prediction by depicting Israel's former rights and obligations as now the possession and responsibility of Christ's Church (I Peter 2:4-10, cf. Rev. 5:9, 10).

2. *The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you.* Nevertheless, Jesus does not mean that no Jew could be saved. Rather, their exclusive, national right to God's privileged blessings has ended and now they must enter into God's Kingdom just as anyone else would through trusting obedience to Christ. They never had an automatic right to permanence in God's Kingdom merely because they were born in Abraham's family (Matt. 3:8-10; cf. John 8:33, 37, 39; Rom. 2:28f.; 4:12, 16). But, because they thought otherwise, they suffer the natural result, the intellectual blindness and emotional hardness toward the Gospel, which, as a people, they continue to harbor yet today. (Cf. Rom. 11:8-10, 25; I Thess. 2:15f.) While this is a judgment against the nation as a whole, it can never be valid for single individuals who, like all the early Christians prior to Cornelius' conversion, are Hebrews who believe in God's Messiah and so are saved. (Cf. Rom. 11:1; Acts 21:20.)
3. *The kingdom of God . . . shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.* Even if stated in a minor key, that Israel should lose its privileged position means that the good tidings will be addressed to everyone! (Acts 13:46; 28:28; Gal. 3:26ff.; Eph. 2:11-22).

This total destruction of the Jewish monopoly on God, at which time the period of special grace for the Hebrews as a people would come to an end, and in which a new people of God would be clearly distinguished from that nation, could be no other moment than the disastrous Jewish war which ended in the massacre of thousands of Jews, the destruction of Jerusalem and the permanent devastation of the temple, the end of the Levitical worship as formerly known. At this same time it became increasingly apparent to the world that, whereas the Church of Christ had inherited the true foundations of Old Testament religion and grown up within the national framework

of the Israelitish people, it was nevertheless a quite different spiritual force to be dealt with. But this new *nation* of which Jesus here speaks was not merely a new political entity, a new world government, similar to the Roman empire (cf. Rev. 13), but an international community, a Kingdom made up of spiritual Israel, Jewish and Gentile Christians all dedicated to the will of God and each other, producing the results God had always longed for: love for God and man, faithful obedience and sincere righteousness. (Cf. I Peter 2:9f.; contrast Exod. 19:5f.; Cf. Gal. 3:26ff.; Eph. 2:11-22; Col. 3:10f.)

No darker heresy could be imagined than Jesus' shocking assertion that Israel as such could no longer be considered the sole depository of divine truth nor the prime (if not unique) object of divine attention, or that any other nation could satisfy God's requirements quite as well as that people He had always considered His private jewel. But if Jesus can deal such a deadly body-blow to Jewish provincialism, what would He say to American civil religion that claims to see in American national history the embodiment of God's unique blessing, but fails to recognize American blindness to many of God's most fundamental claims on life? Or what if the new people of God, the Church, fail to *bring forth the fruits thereof*? Is God obligated to maintain dead timber (Matt. 3:10)? Has not His procedure always been to remove an unbelieving generation and raise up a people that would obey (Exod. 32:9f., 14; Num. 20:12; 14:11-35; Rev. 2:4f.)?

#### L. Double Punishment Inflicted (21:44)

Although important manuscripts of Matthew do not contain this verse and even if the Apostle did not record it, still Jesus made this threat (Luke 20:18). While it appears to have been inserted by a scribe from Luke, three reasons suggest that Matthew actually could have written it, as the other manuscripts testify:

1. Two words are changed: Luke adds "Everyone" and has "that stone" instead of "this stone." Were this verse a direct transcription from Luke, these variations at least indict the scribe of carelessness. The simpler hypothesis is that Matthew himself simply recorded the words differently.
2. Had a scribe inserted it from Luke, the better place to insert it would have been immediately after verse 42, i.e. after Jesus' citation of Psalm 118:22 where the allusion to "the rejected cornerstone" would have been clearer because more direct, as Luke actually has it (Luke 20:17f.).

3. The textual tradition is significantly divided, i.e. not all the best manuscripts are against considering verse 44 as belonging to Matthew. However, the United Bible Societies' Editorial Committee enclose the verse in double square brackets to indicate their opinion that it is an accretion to the text, "yet because of the antiquity of the reading and its importance in the textual tradition, the Committee decided to retain it in the text" (*A Textual Commentary*, 58).

**21:44 And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust.** Is Jesus talking about two kinds of punishment for the wicked, i.e. remedial and final? Or is He referring to two distinct time factors, i.e. an early stumbling and a later judgment? In what sense are we to interpret what seems to be a mixed metaphor, i.e., how can a stone lying in the path of the incautious over which they stumble become something that, in turn, falls upon them?

The answer to these queries may be found, not in the attempt to decipher Jesus' metaphors, but in asking a better question: where did He get His language? In fact, both Isaiah and Daniel had used similar expressions. Did Jesus borrow from them?

JESUS (Matt. 21:44; Luke 20:18)

He that falls on this stone shall be broken to pieces.

but on whomsoever it shall fall,

it will scatter him as dust.

ISAIAH 8:13-15

The Lord Almighty . . . will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare.

Many of them will stumble;  
they will fall and be broken  
they will be snared and captured.

DANIEL 2:44, 34f.

In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. . . . a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

This impression is even more convincing when seen in combination with Jesus' citation of the other "Rejected Stone" passage, Psalm 118:22f. Since the Lord was already quoting Scripture, it should not be thought strange that, after casting Isaiah's Vineyard Song in a new form, He continue to weave these three great Messianic texts together into one great revelation. (Study Peter's combination of Ps. 118:22 and Isa. 8:14f. adding Isa. 28:16 in I Peter 2:4-8.) If the Lord is indeed combining these great prophecies, the final effect of the combination is breathtaking!

1. *He that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces*, interpreted in the Isaianic context, means that Israel in general would break itself on the Lord Almighty. However, hope was held out for anyone who would regard Him as holy and fear Him. While the nation would break itself, He would be a sanctuary for individuals. If Isaiah's later revelation (28:15f.) bears on our understanding, we see that God placed this precious stone on man's path so he could build upon it as upon a solid foundation. Consequently, *he who falls upon this stone* has deliberately tried to ignore its presence in his path and so suffers the consequence by breaking himself upon its solid reality. But Jesus applies to Himself this Old Testament language! He does so with propriety, because He is God in the flesh. This means that, after our contact with Christ, it is quite impossible to swagger on as if His massive presence had not staggered us, or as if He were not the only basis upon which our lives must finally be grounded. Christ, in the days of His humiliation, had none of the world's usual attributes to qualify Him for prestige, position and power (Isa. 52:14; 53:2f.). Rather, He was a cause of stumbling (Matt. 11:6), a great Stone set in place to cause the fall of many in Israel (Luke 2:34). Consequently, there was nothing remedial in this punishment, since *he that falls on this stone shall be broken to pieces*. Even if this fall is wholly accidental, it is nonetheless real and fatal.
2. *On whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust*. This vigorous language expresses Jesus' view of the sweeping, inexorable omnipotence of His Kingdom. If we have correctly surmised that our Lord is utilizing catch phrases from Daniel, then His words glow with new splendor. In fact, in Daniel 2:44 the great Stone that smashed four mighty ancient empires into oblivion and became itself a perpetual power on earth is the Kingdom of the Son of

Man. (Cf. Dan. 2 with Dan. 7.) Originally, Jewish readers would have assumed that Daniel's revelations described Messiah's total victory over Gentile nations only. But, as they were to learn at Jerusalem in 70 A.D., even the unbelievers in Israel were also meant. God had revealed His Son's total victory over ALL unbelieving nations (Rev. 13:7f., 12ff., 16; 19:18)! Even if *whomsoever* may well include "every tribe, people, tongue and nation, even all who dwell on the earth" that stumble over Christ, it is also intensely individual. This theme of individual responsibility will be developed further in the following parable (Matt. 22:11-14). Although God had worked with nations before, His present dealings regard individuals far more than before, even if they were never excluded from His earlier concerns. (Cf. Ezra 8:18; Jer. 31:30; Deut. 24:16.) Nothing—no nation nor individual—can stop God's Son from completing His appointed mission.

Upon reflection, then, we see that the great Stone of stumbling in Isaiah 8:14f. and the mighty Crushing Stone unhewn by human hands of Daniel 2:34f., 44 both stand behind Jesus' terminology. Further, in synopsis with Psalm 118:22f. and by His insistent repetition of the key word "Stone," the Lord shows that the Rejected Stone, the Crushing Stone and the Stumbling Stone are to be identified with God and His Kingdom. If so, then because these figures are to be thought of as literary parallels of the Rejected Son of the Vineyard Owner, He means that this Rejected Son is somehow deity and ruler of God's Kingdom!

In this way Jesus has accomplished two ends:

1. He conclusively answered the authorities' original test of His right to teach: He is Himself the Rejected Son, the Rejected Stone, the Stone of Stumbling and the Crushing Stone, i.e. the Ruler of God's Kingdom, therefore God incarnate and fully possessed of all necessary authority. But He had not answered their challenge in such a way as to furnish them merely more material to criticize. His method left them unable instantly to debate His terms. Rather, —and this explains why His connections may seem less clear to the logic of westerners less familiar with that Old Testament language in which His original audience was steeped—He gave them an answer to ponder. By using familiar Biblical language, He led these exponents of Old Testament studies to reflect on His meaning and perhaps to be induced to grasp the hope expressed in Isaiah

28:16: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed."

2. His illuminating combination of Old Testament prophecies should open the eyes of all His enemies to the awful consequences of attempting to eliminate Him. God's Word, in short, had already vividly pictured their destruction. Sadly, however, history has now completely vindicated Jesus' applications of these texts, since the Jewish nation was *broken in pieces* precisely because of its lack of cohesive unity behind the Messiah of God, its misunderstanding of its own role in God's plan and its materialistic nationalism and its consequent failure to appreciate the spiritual character of the Kingdom. These led it to disaster in the Jewish War and the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, Jesus winnowed this chaff (Matt. 3:12; see my "Coming of the Son of Man," *Matthew*, II after Matt. 10). Nevertheless, His meaning does not deadend here, since ALL His enemies must fail and all forms of opposition shall taste defeat! (I Cor. 15:24f.; Matt. 22:44 = Ps. 110:1; Luke 19:27; II Thess. 1:5-10 and the total message of Revelation.)

So, double punishment awaits those who presume to reject Jesus: they break themselves upon Him and He gives them their just deserts both now and in eternity. No empire however great can withstand the power of our Lord Jesus Christ! What a gloriously comforting word for embattled saints!

### M. Jesus' Story Hit Home (21:45)

21:45 For chief priests and Pharisees see notes on 21:23. **When (they) heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.** It is not impossible that they had already begun to feel the impact of His stories earlier. In fact, when the justice of terrible vengeance upon the tenant farmers came to light, someone had recoiled in horror, "May it never happen!" (Luke 20:16). By this time, says Matthew, the blast waves of *his parables* had begun to hit home with terrific force, convincing them that, psychologically, at least, they had been unseated. Because particularly they had sneered at John the Baptist, by the Parable of the Two Sons they stood accused of flagrant disobedience toward God (21:28-32). Further, since they had inherited the "duly authorized" leadership of Israel, unquestionably they were

responsible for the care of God's vineyard, Israel, so they now saw themselves depicted as the murderous husbandmen of Jesus' story (21:33-41). The collective message of His illustrations, therefore, had just indicted them of stubborn, continued rebellion against God. How could they be anything but infuriated?

**They perceived that he spake of them.** How much of what we understand of Jesus' meaning did they grasp? Was their perception prompted by the accusations of a guilty conscience? Was it not rather born of a wily, political instinct of self-preservation? Anyone so thoroughly skewered by so clear a story alluding to the well-known history of their own people could not but get the point. But since they rejected the premises on which His argument was based, i.e. that He is God's Son and final revelation, what would His scarcely veiled warnings have meant to them? Would they have admitted to rebelling against Him whom they considered to be their own God? We too must beware lest we assume that understanding the Lord's words is equal to submission to His instruction.

#### N. The Clergy Fumbles Its Responsibility (21:46)

**21:46 And when they sought to lay hold on him, they feared the multitudes, because they took him for a prophet.** Despite their fury, they struggle helplessly with fear. The same indecisiveness that blocked any firm commitment regarding the ministry of John the Baptist also frustrates any determined, open action against Jesus now (cf. 14:5). Here is written their intellectual and moral damnation. In fact, if they grieved for the perversion of true religion, if they burned within for the scattering of Israel's flock, if they were angered at the deep injustice of the deception they were convinced Jesus practiced upon innocent followers, there could be no halting, no hesitation; only decisive action, regardless of immediate, personal consequences.

Ironically, they began instantly to feel the truth of His prediction! (Luke 20:18). They could not even touch Him right then without serious self-damage. Foolishly, they postponed their daylight attack in favor of a secret night arrest in the vain hope to avoid stumbling over the Stone in His story.

**They took him for a prophet.** (See notes on 21:11.) This, then, is the measure of the crowd's responsibility to trust Jesus totally and render Him joyful obedience and loyalty. While this is a good opinion of Christ and one that could induce them to confess His true Messiahship, and while it held His enemies at bay for awhile, thus stalling

any opposition until His purpose was served, this opinion would not lead to salvation unless Israel surrendered to Him. In fact, for far too many the phrase, *they took him for a prophet*, meant nothing more than "Jesus was a popular preacher." Once against Matthew closes a major event by underlining Jesus' prophetic office. (Cf. 13:57 notes; 21:11.)

Bested at their own game of "Hard Questions," hemmed in by their own ineptness and embarrassed by Jesus' precise scoring, they see no exit where they may gracefully bow out. Purple with rage but completely helpless, they must endure another of His fascinating, but lethal, stories.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what general context is the parable of the wicked vine-growers told? Tell the immediate background or circumstance in which Jesus told this story. Indicate:
  - a. the facts that took place just before this parable; then tell
  - b. the broad historical background which furnished Jesus material for His story.
2. According to Luke, to whom did Jesus address this parable?
3. List the five things the vineyard's owner did to assure himself that everything would go well for his vineyard. Tell why each detail was important.
4. Who in the Old Testament had already used these same symbols adapted here by Jesus? To what did the original author(s) of these symbols refer? Where may a closely similar version of this parable be found? In what respects does Jesus' version differ from it?
5. What did the owner of the vineyard do after doing everything he could for the positive development of his vineyard? How is this significant for the parable's meaning?
6. Everything in the parable leads us to believe that the owner of the vineyard expected only one thing from his vineyard. What is it?
7. When was it that the owner began to send his representatives to the vineyard? That is, in what season?
8. How many agents were sent by the owner to the vine-growers?
9. How were the owner's agents treated once they arrived at the vineyard?
10. Who was the last agent sent by the owner?

11. What was the owner's hope that caused him to send this latter agent?
12. What was the reaction of the vine-growers when they became aware of the arrival of the owner's last agent? (a) What was their reasoning? (b) What did they do?
13. With what question does Jesus terminate the parable and point to its moral?
14. What was the answer Jesus' listeners gave?
  - a. What would happen to the murderous vine-growers?
  - b. What would happen to the vineyard?
  - c. What would happen in regard to the fruit of the vineyard?
15. What Psalm is cited by Jesus in support of His position? When had this same Psalm been cited earlier in this same Last Week of Jesus?
16. What is the correct application of the Psalm quoted by Jesus?
  - a. What is "the stone rejected"?
  - b. Who are the builders who rejected it?
  - c. What does it mean to become "the head of the corner"?
  - d. What importance does this expression have: "this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes"?
  - e. In what way is Jesus' resurrection implied by His citing this Psalm?
17. What terrible prophecies does Jesus make at the conclusion of this parable? Have they been fulfilled yet? If so, when and where?
18. Where in the Old Testament had these prophecies already been suggested, if not stated outright?
19. Explain the remark about the great stone of stumbling and crushing.
20. How did the authorities react to Jesus' words?
21. What was the people's attitude toward Jesus? How did this attitude block the rulers?
22. Show how this parable is further amplified and explained by the parable of the slighted wedding invitation, which follows it. Show what features are common to both parables.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO OUTLINES

- Section 57. (continued) Jesus Meets Challenges of Authority
- D. The Parable of the Slighted Marriage Invitations (22:1-14)
- Section 58. Jesus Answers Captious Questions (22:15-46)
- A. The Question of Tribute to Caesar (22:15-22)
  - B. The Question of the Resurrection (22:23-33)
  - C. The Question of the Great Commandment (22:34-40)
  - D. The Question Regarding the Son of David (22:41-46)

### STUDY OUTLINES

#### AN INVITATION TO JOY (22:1-14)

- I. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL (22:1-7) "To the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16; 2:9)
  - A. God's gracious provision for Israel's blessing (22:1-4) "The goodness and long-suffering of God" (Cf. Rom. 11:22)
  - B. Israel's ingratitude and rejection (22:5, 6)
    - 1. Crass indifference (22:5)
    - 2. Outright brutality toward the king's messengers (22:6)
  - C. God's punishment of the Jews (22:7) "the well-deserved severity of the punishment"
- II. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH THE GENTILES (22:8-10) "And also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16; 2:9)
  - A. The undeserved goodness of the invitation (22:8)
  - B. God's graciousness to the Gentiles (22:9f.)
- III. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH INDIVIDUALS AT JUDGMENT (22:11-13) "To each according to his deeds"
  - A. The presumptuous gall of the hypocrite (22:11)
  - B. The gentle request for an explanation unanswered (22:12)
  - C. The ultimate damnation of hypocrites (22:13)
- IV. THE BOTTOM LINE IN GOD'S DEALINGS (22:14)

#### THE RELIGIO-POLITICAL QUESTION:

##### IS JESUS A REBEL? (22:15-22)

- I. A QUESTION TO TRAP THE TEACHER (22:15-17)
  - A. The Plot (22:15, 16a)

- B. The Flattery (22:16)
- C. The Crucial Question
- II. A COUNTER-TRAP (22:18-20)
  - A. The Trappers Unmasked (22:18)
  - B. The Counter-Trap Executed (22:19, 20)
- III. THE THEOLOGY OF DOUBLE TAXATION (22:21)
  - Jesus' Masterful Solution: Dual Citizenship
- IV. THE TRAPPERS GIVE UP (22:22)

**THE DOCTRINAL-EXEGETICAL QUESTION:  
IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH? (22:23-33)**

- I. THE PROBLEM: Sadducees affirm: "There is no resurrection, no life after death." (22:23-28)
  - A. The legal basis: the brother-in-law code (22:24)
  - B. The hypothetical case (22:25-27)
  - C. The resulting conundrum (22:28)
- II. THE SOLUTION: Jesus exposes the cause of these materialists' ignorance (22:29-32)
  - A. Proposition: "You are wrong because of fundamental ignorance (22:29a)
  - B. Explanation of His accusation (22:29b)
    - 1. Ignorance of Scripture that reveals life after death as true
    - 2. Ignorance of God's power to make resurrection possible
  - C. Proofs:
    - 1. Your ignorance of God's power blinds you to the possibility that the resurrection world shall be different from this one: heaven is not earth. (22:30)
    - 2. Your ignorance of God's Scripture blinds you to that text of all texts that reveals that God is still worshipped by LIVING men! (22:31f.)
- III. THE RESULT: Jesus' masterful rebuttal inspires praise. (22:33)

**THE SPECULATIVE QUESTION:  
THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT (22:34-40)**

- I. SITUATION: Pharisees test Jesus' rabbinical credentials with the problem: What kind of commandment is great in the law? (22:34-36)

II. JESUS' RESPONSE: (22:37-40)

- A. First table of the Law:
  - 1. What we are to do: "Love"
  - 2. Whom we are to love: "the Lord our God"
  - 3. How we are to love Him: "wholeheartedly"
- B. Second table of the Law:
  - 1. What we are to do: "Love"
  - 2. Whom we are to love: "our neighbor"
  - 3. How we are to love him: "as ourselves."

THE QUESTION TO CONTEMPLATE:  
THE MESSIAH'S TRUE NATURE (22:41-46)

- I. A COMMON CONVICTION: "Son of David" (22:41, 42)
- II. A CORRECTING QUOTATION: Psalm 110:1 (22:43-44)
- III. A CRUCIAL QUESTION: "If David's Lord, how then his Son?" (22:45)
- IV. ALL QUESTIONING CANCELLED (22:46)

SECTION 57

JESUS MEETS CHALLENGES OF AUTHORITY:  
THREE PARABLES OF WARNING  
D. THE PARABLE OF THE SLIGHTED  
MARRIAGE INVITATIONS

TEXT: 22:1-14

22:1 And Jesus answered and spake again in parables unto them, saying, 2 The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, 3 and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast: and they would not come. 4 Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, -and all things are ready: come to the marriage feast. 5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise; 6 and the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 But the

king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. 9 Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast. 10 And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests. 11 But when the king came in to behold the guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding-garment: 12 and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth. 14 For many are called, but few chosen.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Is this story a "parable" in the modern, accepted sense of the word or an allegory? What other parables of Jesus help you to decide this?
- b. How does this parable carry forward concepts expressed in other parables Jesus told on this occasion?
- c. How does this parable answer the original question of the authorities "By what authority do you do these things, and who gave you this authority?"
- d. How do you account for the fact that God's messengers gathered "all whom they found, both bad and good"? Is not God interested in gaining only good people?
- e. Why was the king perfectly within his rights to react with anger toward those citizens who rejected his invitation to a wedding feast?
- f. Again, how would you respond to someone who believes that the king's punishment of the man without the wedding garment was too severe in relation to his offense?
- g. When Jesus concluded the story with "Many are called, but few are chosen," do you think He meant this as a simple observation about facts in the story itself, or as a final warning, or what?
- h. In contrast to the king's apparent harshness, how is his patience and mercy everywhere evident in this story?
- i. Do you see any historical allusion(s) in this parable? If so, what are they?

- j. Identify the critical moment in the king's dealings with his subjects first invited. How is this crisis similar to that in the parable of the wicked husbandmen? How is the crisis resolved in a similar way in both cases?
- k. How does this parable reveal the overall plan of God for the government of His Kingdom?

### PARAPHRASE

Jesus began again to teach them using illustrations: "The way God runs His Kingdom may be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. He sent his servants out to summon those who had been invited to the marriage feast, but they did not want to come. So he sent some more servants the second time, urging, 'Tell those who have been invited, Look here! I have prepared my dinner: my cattle and fattened livestock are butchered. Everything is ready, so come on to the wedding banquet!' The rest grabbed the king's servants, brutally mistreated them and finally assassinated them. This infuriated the king, so he dispatched his army to destroy those assassins and set their city on fire. Then he turned to his servants, 'The wedding is quite ready, but those invited did not deserve the honor. So go to the street corners and invite to the marriage feast everyone you encounter there.' So those servants went out into the streets and brought together everyone they could find, bad and good alike. Finally, the wedding hall was packed with dinner guests.

"However, when the king came in to inspect his guests at the table, he noticed a man who had not dressed himself in a wedding garment. He addressed him, 'Friend, how is it that you came in here without proper wedding attire?' But the man could say nothing. Therefore the king ordered his attendants, 'Tie up his hands and feet and throw him outside where it is dark and where people weep in hopeless regret and grit their teeth in futile anger!' You see, even though many are invited, few are selected."

### SUMMARY

By means of the prophets God had invited Israel to enjoy the festal joy of the Messianic Kingdom. However, by indifference and positive hostility, the nation forfeited its privileged position. Worse, they would finally be severely punished by a patient and justly angry God.

At this juncture, God would enlarge the Kingdom's outreach, offering its privileges to all people alike. And yet, none may presume to ignore the conditions upon which their participation in His grace is permitted. Otherwise, these too will be rejected. Final selection is not based upon God's invitation alone, but upon every person's submission to the will of the King!

## NOTES

### I. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL (22:1-7)

22:1 **And Jesus answered and spake again in parables unto them, saying.** Because our present chapter divisions may not represent Matthew's intended subject division at all, it is not unlikely that he intended to connect the Parable of the King's Feast with the hierarchy's malevolent intentions stated by our author in 21:45f. If so, the Lord addressed this parable to an enraged hierarchy to warn them of the destiny their malice deserved. So, Matthew's expression, *spake again*, points to a new start in Jesus' teaching, as if an interruption had stopped the flow of His instruction. This break may have been nothing more than the increasing agitation among the leaders because their attempt to arrest Him had aborted. Seeing their design entirely frustrated by Jesus' popularity, they lapse into a sullen silence, which permitted Him to *speak again in parables to them*. *In parables* does not necessarily point to more than one story forthcoming, as if we should chop the present parable in two or three parts, or accuse Matthew of inaccuracy, since he reports only one story. It just indicates the rhetorical category He chose as He began again after the interruption, i.e. "parables," not some other form of teaching. With Lenski (*Matthew*, 848) we must sense the unity of thought that flows through every part of the parable, making it one cohesive picture not to be thought of as a pasting together of several unrelated stories. This story consists of three distinct parts, but each one presents one important phase of God's dealings with the human race:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. God's dealings with Israel                 | Study how this parable carries                                    |
| 2. God's period of mercy to the Gentiles      | forward ideas expressed in the stories that precede it. (Notes on |
| 3. God's treatment of individuals at judgment | 21:33)  |

Jesus had already used an illustration closely parallel to this story here, i.e. the Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24). Details differ, but the main thrust is the same.

Although Jesus' language is decidedly parabolic, His thrust is not at all unlike the Revelation He gave in apocalyptic form to John (Rev. 1:1). In fact, Revelation uses apocalyptic imagery in almost parabolic ways to illustrate old, familiar truths, one of which is the precious joy promised to "those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9), an event sadly missed by those who in our story flouted the king's invitation.

**22:2 The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king.** (See notes on 18:23.) By comparing God's Kingdom to a certain king, the Lord drew immediate attention to God's procedures. God's government is broadly parallel to the policy followed by the king in our story.

**Who made a marriage feast.** In oriental practice the engagement ceremony usually occurred many months before the actual wedding. Although the couple are considered married, they do not, however, live together as husband and wife until after the rite of marriage is celebrated by bringing the bride to the groom's home. This happy occasion is celebrated by a *marriage feast* to which his friends are invited. (See notes on 1:18; cf. 25:1-10; Judg. 14:10-20; Gen. 29:22-30.)

**For his son.** At first glance *his son* appears to be a minor figure in Jesus' story, because he is not mentioned again. But the slighting of the feast insults and embarrasses *the son* as much as the king. But that *his son* is no mere secondary figure is understood contextually: both parables touch on people's treatment of God's Son (21:33-46; 22:1-14). In the previous story He was pictured as nothing less than the Son of the Owner of Israel (the vineyard owner's son). Here He is the Son of the King!

**22:3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast.** Before our story opens, the people in question have already been invited to the feast, since the perfect passive participle (*toš keklēménous*) indicates that the present announcement was to be given to those who already had a standing invitation to the feast. Two invitations were considered normal custom: the first, general call that announced the forthcoming wedding banquet, and the second, special call to attend the banquet itself. The former apparently preceded the latter by time sufficient for both host and guests to make appropriate preparations. Food must be procured and

prepared, accommodations for the banquet itself must be readied, servants must be organized for serving it. Guests must attire themselves suitably for the occasion. Perhaps gifts were purchased for the celebrations (Esth. 2:17f.). Then, when the allotted time for everyone's preparations had concluded, a second call was sounded to assemble the guests. (Cf. Esth. 6:14.) Not only was it an appropriate reminder, but it signalled the festival's proper beginning, so there would be no embarrassing badly-timed arrivals marring the expected joy.

In saying *his servants*, does Jesus mean the Old Testament prophets, as in His previous parable? (Cf. 21:34, 36.) Since this parable's main point centers around immediate entrance into the Kingdom, and not the long-range preparation for it illustrated in the previous story, it would not seem that Jesus had the ministry of the ancient prophets in view. Theirs was a ministry which would have more to do with the original announcements of the coming Kingdom in what for them would have been yet distant future. Contrarily, for John the Baptist, Jesus and the Apostles, "the Kingdom is at hand!" (Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:14f.; Matt. 10:7) is the ringing challenge whereby these called the nation to prepare for and participate in the Kingdom immediately to begin.

The king sent forth his servants to call, not just anyone but **them that were bidden to the marriage feast**. Evidently the king had invited only those citizens of attainment suitable to be considered worthy guests at a royal wedding. This is to be a feast offered by their king in which they, as loyal citizens, should feel highly honored to take part. This was the social event of a lifetime, the chance to attend a princely wedding feast, a time of national celebration! But more critical is the fact that this is the invitation of a KING, not merely that of a friend that can be taken less seriously. He is a host not to be snubbed.

To the Hebrews listening to Jesus this imagery spoke volumes, because Israel had a standing invitation (or "call") to participate in the great Messianic banquet of God. Instructive is the number of times (6) some form of the word "call" (*kaléo, klētoi*) appears in this episode, a fact that underlines Jesus' concept of "the calling of God" and the responsibilities attendant upon those who are "called." The entire history of Israel was the outworking of God's call of Abraham (Heb. 11:8) and the conquered national calling (*the klēsis tou theou*, Rom. 11:29). So it is not surprising that Jesus should speak to a "called people" in these terms. In any other story involving

invitations to a party “call” is but a normal word for “summoning or inviting.” But here it is a pointed reference to the previously-established spiritual relationship Israel enjoyed with God. Further, for Israel, participation at the great banquet of God would have commanded the highest claim on their time (cf. Isa. 25:6ff.). It was a feast to which they undoubtedly supposed themselves to have most right. It should have been a foregone conclusion that they should have longed to participate.

Presumably the expected guests had already committed themselves to attend the banquet. Otherwise, the king would not have wasted time on preparations for them. Now, right at banquet time *they would not come*. Literally, they willed not to come (*ouk éthelon eltheîn*)! Because they were the elite, they had been summoned, while others were not. Although they were the nobles of his realm and, of all people, should have been most ready for the feast, ironically, they are the least ready, because their will is dead—set against going!

Israel had been invited for centuries and had declared its intention to honor God’s Christ, but now that He had arrived, they deliberately and defiantly refused Him. (An old story: Rom. 10:21.) *They would not* echo the disobedience of the polite son and the willful reaction of the unruly son (*ou thélo*, 21:28-32). The unrepentant, uncomplaining spirit of the hierarchy is lurking just below the surface of this image (Matt. 23:37: *ouk ethelésate*). For Jesus, therefore, the cause of moral evil lies in the human will, in man’s lack of desire for God and goodness. (Cf. John 5:40; 7:17.)

22:4 **Again he sent forth other servants.** *Again* now means for the third time: they had already been invited, then called and now called again. Whereas a normal monarch would have boiled with indignation at this affront and unleashed his fury instantly, THIS sovereign surprises us with incredibly patient mercy. Israel had heard repeated calls from God (Rom. 10:18-21). Here again, as in the preceding parable, God’s long-suffering is depicted, especially in the many servants sent by the Owner of the vineyard (21:34-36). Numerous *other servants* would be commissioned and sent to call Israel into the Kingdom before the fatal deadline would pass. Does the Lord have in mind here the ministry of the Twelve?

There is an intense urgency in the king’s latest message: **I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed**, because meat, once dressed, begins to deteriorate without refrigeration. *My oxen and fatlings* speaks of the magnitude of his preparations for

the vast crowd anticipated. *Fatlings* are not some special kind of animal, but those animals, like sheep or goats, that have fed a special diet to be butchered for food. *All things are ready* conjures up loaded tables of food and drink just waiting for the guests' arrival. All the guests had to do was *come to the feast*. Matthew Henry (V, 312) caught the true spirit of this *marriage feast*. In effect, God was offering Israel:

All the privileges of church-membership, and all the blessings of the new covenant, pardon of sin, the favour of God, peace of conscience, the promises of the gospel, and all the riches contained in them, access to the throne of grace, the comforts of the Spirit, and a well-grounded hope of eternal life. These are the preparations for this feast, a heaven upon earth now, and a heaven in heaven shortly. God has prepared it in his counsel, in his covenant. It is a dinner. . . .

### ISRAEL'S INGRATITUDE AND REJECTION (22:5, 6)

22:5 **But they made light of it** (*amelésantes*): literally, "they neglected it, did not care about it, did not think about it, were negligent"). Here is the peril of simple neglect and not putting first what must be supreme. (Cf. Heb. 2:3.) They simply acted as if nothing had happened, as if the highest royal invitation were not the opportunity of a lifetime to be seized instantly with pleasure and joyous excitement. **They went their ways, one to his own farm, and another to his merchandise.** There is a proper time to consider partying clearly secondary to business responsibilities. But THIS was no common party. These self-centered people put their own personal interests and concerns, their own enrichment and comfort ahead of the happiness and honor of their KING!

The trifles that keep people from properly hearing God's call are often not in themselves evil. This farmer went out to his fields, while the shop-keeper felt the pull of his store, ledgers and sales. Neither one disappeared for a lost week-end in self-indulgence or immoral affairs. Rather, each hurried off to the commendable job of diligent administration of their respective businesses. The unseen treasures of eternity have little appeal for the person who is thoroughly pre-occupied with the trifles and trinkets of time that so insistently claim his attention. Life's tragedy consists in letting the attraction of other trifling things, however good and justifiable in themselves, pull one

away from the one supreme opportunity God holds out to man. Because they openly preferred their own possessions and occupations to the King's royal hospitality, they were showing a contemptuous neglect and indifference to the King's invitation. (Cf. Luke 14:17-20.) This is why they will suffer appropriately. Even before anyone goes to the length of murdering God's messengers, the majority of God's people had already grievously offended Him by making light of His gracious invitation.

**22:6 And the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully and killed them.** This is not merely murder, but also high treason against their King! Because these messengers came not in their own name, but in that of their King, this cowardly violence must be considered as directed against him who sent them. (Cf. Matt. 10:40ff.; 23:34f.; Luke 10:16; John 12:48; 13:20; 15:18-21.) In the previous parable the ecclesiastical authorities in Israel were represented as bullying and brutalizing God's messengers (21:35). Perhaps here too we should see these barbarous butchers as standing for the same hostile authorities. While the farmers and tradesmen merely ignored God's men, the persecuting spirit of self-righteous religionists and those who used them for a smokescreen mercilessly slew them. Is this an impossible scene? Critics who doubt that God's representatives would ever have been so ill-treated must be led to see how common this deep-rooted tendency is. Which of God's faithful servants has NOT the human race mistreated (Acts 7:52)?

Here Jesus does not indicate His own imminent death as clearly as He did in the previous story (21:37-39). This emphasis on the fate of the latter messengers warns His followers that those who participate in giving men God's message will suffer for their faithfulness to Him. (Cf. Rev. 11:3-10; Phil. 1:27-29; II Thess. 1:5; Acts 14:22.) This prediction was amply fulfilled in the persecutions of the early Church incited by the Jews. (Cf. Acts 4:1ff.; 5:18ff., 40; 6:11ff.; 7:54ff.; 8:1-3; 12:1-4; 13:50; 14:2-5, 19; 20:19-23; 21:27ff.) Nor was this unparalleled in Jewish history. (II Chron. 30:1-11; see notes on 21:35-39.)

**22:7 But the king was wroth:** on the wrath of God pictured by Jesus, see Luke 14:21; 21:23; John 3:36; Matt. 18:34. This representation mirrors the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7). This theme receives fuller development in the Epistles (Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 13:4f.; Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Col. 3:6; I Thess. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9; Heb. 3:11; Rev. 6:16f.; 11:18, etc.) Such wrath is

perfectly just, because no one can turn down the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth with impunity!

**He sent his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.** Some consider this phrase to be evidence that Jesus or Matthew departed from the illustration to insert a literal picture of the reality, because what monarch preoccupied with feverish wedding preparations would launch a war? But such a comment misses the grandeur of THIS king. Rather, what truly great king, even in the midst of ordering wedding preparations, organizing hundreds of servants, listing exquisite menus and redecorating banquet halls, could not merely pronounce that one royal order which would mobilize his battle-ready troops and start them instantly marching against the offenders? It is too small a view of the earthly king in Jesus' story to believe he had not already determined and prepared to deal effectively with *those murderers*. Thus, the glory, omniscience and grandeur of God radiate through this king's efficiency.

This is a clear prediction of the Roman Legions under Vespasian and Titus as God's instruments whereby those guilty of murdering God's messengers would finally be brought to justice and whereby *their city*, Jerusalem, would be *burned*, the very thing feared by Israel's government. (See notes on Matt. 24; cf. Josephus, *Wars*, V,VI; John 11:48.)

In retrospect, the historical reality alluded to here reveals the magnanimous patience of God the King! In fact, He gave these Jewish leaders 40 more years' respite after they murdered His Son and began to persecute His Church. Some priests did repent (Acts 6:7) and some Pharisees believed (Acts 15:5), but tragically few in contrast to the majority. Finally, in 70 A.D. He punished *those murderers and burned their city*.

In what sense could it be said of God that the Roman legions were *his armies*? Undoubtedly it is correct to argue that our God is the Lord of hosts, both heavenly and earthly, and that He can mobilize human troops in the field as easily as He does His heavenly angels, whether men think they are serving God by so doing or not. (Cf. Isa. 10:5-15; 13:5, 17; 44:28—45:13; esp. v. 4; Jer. 51:11, 20-24, 29.) And yet there are intriguing passages in Josephus where even Titus the Roman general is led to appreciate his instrumental role in the hand of God who punished Jerusalem for its wickedness. (*Wars*, VI, 1,5; 9,1; V, 12,4.) Josephus himself fully believed this (*Wars* VI, 2,1; VI,4,5; IV,5,3): "I cannot but think that it was because God

had doomed this city to destruction, as a polluted city, and was resolved to purge his sanctuary by fire, that he cut off these its great defenders. . . .”

## II. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH THE GENTILES (22:8-10)

22:8 Then saith he to his servants, **The wedding is ready.** God has completed all necessary preparations and furnished all necessary inducements to participate. Shall only man be unready? There could be no doubt that all were welcome to share in His bounty, **but they that were bidden were not worthy.** (Cf. Luke 14:21, 24.)

1. The people invited *were not worthy*, not because they lacked a certain rare quality, but because they haughtily disregarded their lord's generous offers. His rule interfered with their own self-interest.
2. They are judged as they had judged (cf. 7:2). Did they consider the king's invitation not worth their time and interest? Now their own sentence is handed down: they had proved themselves not worthy by the judgment they pronounced upon the king's graciousness.
3. The irony of the situation is that they probably considered themselves highly worthy, so worthy, in fact, that they could arrogantly permit themselves the liberty of trifling with the invitation of him who was altogether worthy of their fellowship, praise and joyous sharing, their king. Many today cannot conceive that God can do without them and yet achieve His goals.
4. This judgment, *not worthy*, concerns highly religious people. Religious forms without a heart of love for God prove to be deadly hardening to a person's sensitivity to God. In fact, the formalist wrongly assumes his own indispensability to God just because he performs the required ritual.
5. This judgment by the Lord of all the earth should become the working philosophy of all prophecy students. Modern Israel, i.e. the unbelieving, unrepentant nation, is too often exalted in prophecy schemes, as if she were the precious jewel of God or as if nothing had ever been revealed that would compromise her privileged position in the determinate counsel of God. But how can men continue to argue, by implication if not overtly, that "Israel is worthy" when the King gives this sentence: "They that were bidden were NOT WORTHY!"?

But if *they were not worthy*, why had the king invited them in the first place? Could he not have foreseen this refusal?

1. The king wanted to invite them irrespective of their worthiness or merit, because they were his people. In the story they proved *not worthy* later, not necessarily at the time of the invitation. In the reality, however, they never were worthy (Deut. 9:4-24).
2. The king invited them because of the worthiness of his son. It was appropriate that they honor the son even as they honored the father. Not to honor the son is to dishonor the father.
3. The king invited them because of his own worthiness shown in his love for his people prior to this moment (cf. Deut. 7:7ff.) and especially in his concern that they be permitted to share in his joy upon the marriage of his son.

Paul's explanation eloquently comments on this verse: "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY OF ETERNAL LIFE, behold we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

**22:9 Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways**, that is, at street-corners, or where the streets cross city boundaries to go out into open country (cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 193). In walled cities these would be at the gates; in unwalled, at town boundaries where people leave for their farms or other towns. These would be the most frequented places as people go and come from a given city, hence an excellent place to seek potential guests for the feast. The generous king wisely seeks people where they are to be found.

**As many as ye shall find**: what the king missed in the rank and attainments of his guests, he compensated for in the quantity. Since "the people and quality" had so definitely proved themselves unworthy, they proved in effect to be inferior to all who would appreciate the high honor offered them and would seize the opportunity. Anyone who loves and respects the king is WORTHY, whatever his previous lack of qualification might be, while those who spurn and neglect their good king's bounty are UNWORTHY, whatever their previous attainments!

**Bid to the marriage feast**. The raging and bobtail of society, previously uninvited, now become "the called" (*kalésate eis toùs gàmous*). Here is Christ's theology of calling for the Gentiles. (Cf. I Cor. 1:26; 7:20; Eph. 1:8; 4:1, 4; Phil. 3:14; II Thess. 1:11; II Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1; II Peter 1:10; Rev. 17:14.) This moment is paralleled in the

previous parable in that "the Kingdom of God will be taken away from (Israel) and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (21:41, 43). The Great Commission (28:19f.) is now a foregone conclusion, because the Lord of missions has clearly foreseen the Jewish rejection and now proclaims the future world-wide invitation to the Gentiles to share in the Kingdom of God. But it would be wrong to conclude that He originally planned to save only the Jews and, perceiving their rejection barely in time He radically changed His course so as to avoid a total failure. Matthew has already intimated that God's original planning included the salvation of Gentiles and Jews on the same basis: faith in Jesus (cf. 8:10-12; 12:18-21). While our text is not the birthplace of the Great Commission, it is made of the same stuff and breathes the same spirit. *Go ye therefore* will be echoed again (28:19)!

**22:10 And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together, all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests.** Why are the king's agents always termed "*servants*"? Because, however, great and influential were the prophets serving under the Old Testament era or Christian apostles and evangelists functioning under the new, they are ever *servants* of God and co-workers with each other. (See note on 18:23.) The results of the king's servants ring true to the reality represented: among all the people they found willing to come were *both bad and good*. By implication, then, Jesus' messengers will collect an appallingly mixed bag of guests for God too. Now why would the Lord say that?

1. He may have intended to deflate all purists' hope that the Messianic Kingdom on earth would be a utopian congregation of only "the pure and holy, the perfect." He clearly foresees a period prior to final judgment (v. 11) when the mixture of *both bad and good* would exist simultaneously. This harmonizes neatly with His revelation about the continued presence of evil in the world until the judgment (13:24-30, 36-43). Thus, He explodes the myth of perfection obtainable in this life by the elimination of all those who are *bad*.
2. As in His previous parable where the servants brought in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame (Luke 14:21), those who needed help, so also here Jesus disarms all pride in human goodness and men's notions about what constitutes qualification for God's help. In this sense, then, *both good and bad* means those people,

who in other men's judgment are relatively decent, high-minded people (like Cornelius and other God-fearing, respectable people, Acts 10:1f., 4; 17:4) and the frankly sinful (like the publicans and prostitutes and the Corinthians, I Cor. 6:10f.; I Peter 4:3f.). *Good and bad* would perhaps also be seen from the Jewish standpoint: the *good* would be the self-righteous and orthodox; the *bad* are the Gentiles and the scum of Jewish society (cf. Acts 10:14, 28). Either way, they are all called without regard to their previous moral or religious condition or prior preparation before their call. Jesus obviously does not call the *bad* to remain what they are, but to repent.

3. Jesus' purpose may have been to push His listeners to re-evaluate their judgments about what constitutes goodness and badness. Those who are finally termed *good* are those who trust God's grace and obey Him by faith and, by *bad* He would mean those who did not, even though these too had considered themselves "church members in good standing." This definition and distinction arises out of Jesus' story itself, since those who were finally admitted to the king's feast were only those who (1) heard the gracious invitation specifically addressed to them, (2) accepted it by making the requisite preparation, the wedding garment, and (3) presented themselves at the wedding hall. The *bad* are those who resisted submission to the king's requirements by not making the expected preparation.

So, while they may have been *both bad and good* before they accepted the great invitation, they must all be uniformly garbed when admitted to the festal joy of their lord.

**And the wedding was filled with guests!** Despite the indifference and cruelty of those previously invited, despite the initial insuccesses of the king's servants, this great-hearted king was not thwarted in his determination to share his festal joy with anyone who would accept it. God's divine program to share indescribable eternal happiness with His people cannot be defeated either. Even if the despicable manners and savage brutality of the people previously invited pulled down destruction on their own heads, they did not succeed in undermining the plan of God (Rev. 7:9)!

### III. GOD'S DEALING WITH INDIVIDUALS AT JUDGMENT (22:11-13)

22:11 **But when the king came in to behold the guests:** this is the true climax of the entire drama, because every other element prepared

for this moment and everything that comes after it results from it. The guests, even those who had been invited first, were invited to share in this moment. Jesus' illustration is not a conglomerate of two or more parables, but one plot steadily progressing toward this critical moment of truth.

It can hardly be doubted that *the king came in to behold the guests*, not with an eye to catching some of them unprepared, i.e. without the required garment, but, rather, to rejoice with those who had proved themselves his loyal subjects by accepting his royal invitation. God, too, has no taste for condemning anyone (Ezek. 18:23-32; 33:11; Lam. 3:31-33). Nevertheless, as the sequel proves beyond all doubt, although He finds condemnation distasteful, His sense of justice demands it and He does not hesitate to sentence and punish the guilty.

**When the king came in to behold the guests**, he gazed over a sea of happy faces around his tables. Yet in the midst of the merriment he could still discern *a man who had not on a wedding-garment*. His race, sex, social condition and bank account are completely irrelevant in the light of this serious disqualification: *no wedding-garment!* Although the question of where he should have procured this garment is left quite out of the story, the assumption is that the king's invitation had implied that all guests must respond appropriately by wearing one. In distinguishing this man from the others, it is also assumed that these guests had made this provision, thereby proving that the great-hearted king's demand was neither unknowable, unreasonable nor impossible. In what the *wedding-garment* consisted the Lord did not explain. Local custom would decide this. Certainly it was attire suitable for the occasion, as opposed to soiled, everyday work clothes. Some commentators, following Genesis 45:22; Judges 14:12, 19; II Kings 5:5, 22; 10:22; Revelation 19:8f., suggest that the king himself even furnished it for all guests alike, in which case their only responsibility was that of accepting to wear it (cf. Isa. 61:10).

The reality Jesus here visualized in the *wedding-garment* is not difficult to interpret, since His Revelation used a similar symbol (Rev. 19:7f., perhaps also v. 14). It may be simply "the righteous deeds of the saints." Such clothing is not more self-righteousness, since these robes are "washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9, 13f.; cf. 3:4, 5, 18; 6:11; Heb. 9:14.) Such garments are no fabrication of this world, but the pure gift of divine grace, since even the "righteous deeds of God's people" are really the work

of God Himself graciously working in and through them (Isa. 26:12; Phil. 2:12f.). So, in the end, it is the King Himself who furnishes our wedding garments. And yet we would be without them unless we accepted them and dressed in them, making ourselves fit for His feast on His terms. (Study Heb. 12:14; Col. 3:5-17; Phil. 3:7-11; I Peter 1:22; II Peter 1:3-11.) So God's invitation is conditional.

What, then, is this "gate-crasher's" damning fault? Several factors surface:

1. If the king furnished a costly garment for each guest, not to put it on immediately to join in the spirit and add luster to the feast, would be to show contempt for the gift and despise the giver. It is clearly a self-willed rejection of the king's gracious provision.
2. He had no reverence for his king. The man's damning sin was insensitivity regarding that to which he had been invited. He showed no understanding of the honor one should show to his king or of what would be appropriate dress for participation in a royal banquet. This insensitivity is tantamount to dishonor (Mal. 1:6).
3. He did not understand his king's merciful hospitality. All guests were present, not because they wore wedding apparel, but because this open-hearted king was so intent upon sharing his happiness with them that he ordered the wedding-hall doors thrown open to everyone. The king owed them nothing. They could never have deserved his generosity. They were all present by the king's grace. This ingrate wanted to have the benefits of the feast while rewriting the conditions of participation to suit himself. To the Jew this banquet represented the highest privilege to the Kingdom of God (Luke 14:15; Matt. 8:11f.). But to take part in God's Kingdom means to be ruled by the will of God. Many want the blessings of the Kingdom without the submission this entails. But grace means that we surrender to the terms demanded by Him who extends us that grace.
4. Here is also a self-complacency that could be satisfied with its own garments. Here is the arrogant person who, while claiming to be on God's side, considers his own character good enough to save him. Can anyone be so proud of himself or his accomplishments or so disrespectful of His holiness that he will not change even for God?!
5. If the king required a garment that even the poorest guest could easily obtain for himself at a moment's notice, then this contemptible guest who profaned the wedding feast of the crown prince is lazy, unwilling to sacrifice his own convenience to please the king.

This story, therefore, is a lesson on receiving the grace of God. We do not have to prepare the feast, but we must submit to the spirit of His kind offer and be fitted for participation by His grace. We do not pretend to be worthy of the gift by our wearing the prescribed garments, but we must enter into His feast outfitted according to His expectations. This illustrates the place of commandments in grace: they are a part of the gift of grace, not a series of deeds whereby we earn our place at His table.

Wearing the required garment clearly stands for our effort to respond to the King's goodness (Rom. 8:1-17;). Many New Testaments texts speak of that in which the Christian saint is to be clothed:

1. By faith he begins by putting on Christ at baptism (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3; I Peter 3:20, 21) and so is justified (Rom. 5:1; 8:1).
2. He matures in Christ by deliberately imitating His character (Phil. 2:5):
  - a. This involves putting off the sinful deeds (Rom. 13:12f.; Col. 3:5-9; Eph. 4:22, 25ff.)
  - b. It involves putting on Christ's character (Rom. 13:14; Col. 3:10, 12ff.; Eph. 4:23f.)
3. This all produces a righteousness, not based on personal merit, but one which comes from God and depends on faith (Phil. 3:9; Rom. 5:1; 8:1).

None of this is personal merit, because God mercifully revealed this way to be clothed. This kind of righteousness is God's gift to His people, because He covers them with the robe of His righteousness, taking their sins away (cf. II Cor. 5:21; I John 2:1, 2). They must accept His covering. While ALL are invited—the imperfect, the weak and sinful—nobody is admitted without change. We are not saved by the invitation only or by entering along with the masses only, but by personal preparation. We must respect the King and accept His terms without presuming to tell Him what we shall wear or what He must condone!

22:12 **And he saith unto him, Friend.** *Friend (heteïre)* is an interesting form of address meaning, "comrade, friend or associate." Its generalness says, "I do not know or call you by name," while its warmth says, "I want to treat you kindly anyway." But the generalness of the king's approach is ominous, because the king does not call the man by name, as if he did not care to recognize that most intimate, individualizing part of the man, his name (cf. 7:23; 25:12; II Tim. 2:19).

In each of the three occurrences of *hetêre* in Matthew (20:13; 22:12; 26:50) there is a reciprocal relationship assumed between the user of this word and the one so addressed. Further, in all three cases, the person thus addressed has not lived up to the commitment involved in that relationship. There is a resultant nuance not to miss: the goodness of the speaker and the guilt of the one addressed.

**How camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment?** This question tacitly assumes that either the king furnished the festal robe to each guest or that the most destitute could have instantly obtained it for himself on slight notice. Either way, the guest's responsibility is clear: he should have had that robe on. The king may mean:

1. "How did you manage to slip in past those who should have stopped you at the door because of your obvious indifference to my regulation?" But in the reality, would Jesus refer to security slip-ups at the final Marriage Supper of the Lamb, any more than such a provident king could have forgotten security arrangements at his son's wedding feast? On the other hand, if only the king himself could recognize that wedding garment, the man may have passed muster for all others, only to be unmasked for what he really was in front of his king whose infallible eye alone could detect the difference.
2. "How could you have persuaded yourself to crowd in without the required garment? In what frame of mind did you come in here? What arguments could you have adduced so impelling as to scorn your king's expectations?" This is perhaps the better interpretation, because it stands in stark contrast to the man's reaction: *he was speechless*.
3. Some see Jesus' question as asking, "By what entrance did you come in here without the wedding garment? Certainly not by the proper door where all would be granted recognition and entrance" (cf. John 10:1, 9).

**And he was speechless**, not only without excuses, but without prayers. There is no confession of unworthiness, no seeking mercy, no pleas for forgiveness. He stands there brazen and insolent, made mute (Greek: "muzzled") by his own inability to answer his king according to his true inner feelings. What answer could he offer for his gross violation of his sovereign's hospitality? Like so many, he could have said:

1. "My own garments are just fine like they are! Why should I have to change them?"
2. "My other interests were more important than frantic preparations for a feast really intended for others and only lately thrown open to just anybody."
3. "Your requirement is a just expectation for everyone in general, but I'm an exception."

Had the man originally attempted to deceive the king by hoping he could get by with no festal robe as if the king would not notice? In the reality represented here, no more awful sin could be imagined than the bold attempt to outwit God. No wonder this faker deserves such severe punishment!

By adding this ending to an otherwise good, complete story (cf. Luke 14:15-24), Jesus surprisingly reversed the authorities' demand for His credentials (21:23), turning it into a heart-searching demand for THEIRS. In His story the king suddenly appeared to demand of this man his credentials, that proof by which he presumed to intrude. Jesus, then, warns His inquisitors that each one of them personally must one day face this painfully individual inquest and that each will find himself as excuseless as this man was speechless. They had shown self-complacency, ingratitude toward God's merciful invitations and no reverence for His Son, their true King.

**22:13 Then the king said to the servants.** These *servants* (*diakònis*) are not to be identified with the other "servants" (*douloi*) who had served as the king's heralds. The latter are apostles and prophets, the former are angels who at this feast are appropriately termed "attendants or table waiters" (*diàkonoi*). (Cf. other texts that describe the function of angels as ministers of divine justice: 13:39, 41f., 49f.; their presence at judgment: 16:27; 25:31; II Thess. 1:7f.; Rev. 14:10, 19.)

**Bind him hand and foot.** Why? Would not the shame of this public exposure and forcible removal from the wedding feast have sufficed to guarantee that this unwanted intruder would not return?

1. Apparently not, because the man could perhaps have attempted to make the necessary preparation after the deadline, whereas being bound *hand and foot*, he must see that such tardy reformation is hereby categorically excluded.
2. Jesus intended to exclude all hope that anyone could hope to sneak into the Kingdom and then, when exposed, have a second chance to be readmitted. There is to be no purgatory, either Catholic,

Protestant or Universalist, that somehow saves those who died without having made the required provision God expects.

3. The Lord hereby implies that the possibility of evading God's condemnation is totally out of reach. The damned are hopelessly bound by an irreversible sentence they cannot resist.

**Cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.** Jesus' language slides easily from the parable to the reality, because *the outer darkness* would be especially blinding to this wretch who had grown accustomed to the bright lights of the wedding supper, and he would be *weeping* at his great loss and *gnashing his teeth* in anguish at the realization that his failure is completely his own. On *the outer darkness* and *weeping and gnashing of teeth*, see 8:12; 13:42, 50; 24:51; 25:30; cf. Ps. 112:10; Acts 7:54. (Cf. one interesting ancient Jewish opinion about the wicked's punishment in a dark place barred from light and hope: Wisdom 17.)

Who can complain that the king excluded everyone he found unfit for HIS feast, even if it meant bouncing them out the door right from the table where the unfit sat ready to partake? But the man's sentence is equal to his crime. By his bold unwillingness to show appropriate appreciation for his king's generosity and failing to enter into the spirit of the feast, he showed himself fully equal to those unhumiliated, unsanctified citizens who despised the king's bounty from the very beginning. So he must share their judgment: they were ALL BARRED from access to the king's royal reception.

#### IV. THE BOTTOM LINE (22:14)

21:14 **For many are called, but few chosen.** On another occasion someone asked Jesus, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" (Luke 13:22-30). Rather than answer directly what could be but an idle question, He redirected their attention to the real problem: "You must make your own personal calling and election sure, without worrying about the relative number of elect who eventually make it!" In that context Jesus overturned Jewish nationalistic expectations, while predicting Gentile participation in the Messianic banquet in the Kingdom of God. Here, however, the Lord actually spells out how many will be saved; *few*. (Cf. 7:13f. and other similar reversals of popular estimates: 19:30; 20:16.)

It makes little difference whether, in His story, Jesus put these words in the mouth of the just king or not, since the latter had done

everything humanly possible to call the *many*, but due to the well-known circumstances, *few* were finally *chosen*. How *many are called*? In Jesus' context it must mean not only the hundreds of thousands of Hebrews over the centuries who were called to ready themselves according to the requirements announced by the prophets, but also the thousand million Gentiles who *are called* now by the Gospel (I Thess. 2:14). Also among the many called are the hypocrites in the Church who appear to have accepted the Gospel invitation but refuse to make the sacrifice of time, effort and expense to please God. Here too are those who pretend to believe and those who, secretly or openly, drop off the Vine (John 15:1ff.) by not trusting Jesus to supply them their life. Perhaps they substitute their own source of life or try to appropriate Jesus according to their own terms. But they are all called. Christ illustrated why God called the many, but chose to save the few who chose to accept His invitation. Being *chosen* depends entirely on the answer we give to the *call*. But this is no fresh revelation, because God had always been calling many, but choosing few in every part of Old Testament history. (8 people in the ark, only Joshua and Caleb entered the Promised Land, Gideon's 300, the concept of the remnant, etc.)

Why are so *few chosen*? In Jesus' story it is completely related to each man's free choice to make himself ready to meet the king's requirements. This principle explains Peter's exhortation to make our CALLING AND ELECTION sure (II Peter 1:10). So *few are chosen*, because most folks do not want what God has to offer. They are either indifferent to it or are outright hostile, while others who think they want it suppose they can get it cheaper. The rejects eliminate themselves in droves! So, ironically, they are not chosen, because they chose not to be chosen! The elect of God, therefore, are always those who choose to meet His requirements for election.

With Jesus there is no easy optimism about human moral perfectability. While God's invitation is indiscriminate, His final selection is not. He is no indulgent Heavenly Grandfather whose only program is that, after all is said and done, it might be written: "A good time was had by all" (C. S. Lewis). Rather, He is a God of high holiness who will not tolerate iniquity even in the outcasts, the underprivileged and the scorned! They too must respond to His demands for a change of commitment, submitting to life within His will.

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. List the points of similarity between this parable and the one preceding it.
2. Show how this parable differs from the one preceding it.
3. Of what expression or phase or section of the Kingdom of heaven is this story illustrative?
4. How does this parable fit in the train of thought expressed by Jesus in His answer to the challenge of His authority, the parable of the two sons and the parable of the wicked husbandmen? What new thoughts does it bring out?
5. How many invitations did the king make to his subjects? Why was more than one necessary?
6. What is the picture involved in the expression: "My oxen and my fat calves are killed"?
7. What varying kinds of reactions did the king's messengers find among those invited to the feast?
8. What was the king's emotional reaction to his citizens' treatment of his invitation?
9. What did the king do about his subjects' treatment of his invitation and his messengers?
10. When the prepared wedding feast lacked banqueters, what did the king order his servants to do about this shortage?
11. In what two significant ways had those originally invited to the feast proved themselves "unworthy" of it?
12. Where were the king's servants to find banqueters to share in the feast?
13. What kinds of people did they find and bring back?
14. What is the implied responsibility of the guest "who had no wedding garment"? What had he done wrong?
15. What was the king's attitude toward this man?
16. What is Jesus' conclusion to the parable? What did He mean by it?
17. Identify the various details in Jesus' story:
 

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The king and his son</li> <li>b. The wedding feast</li> <li>c. Those who were invited first</li> <li>d. The messengers sent to call them</li> <li>e. Their reaction toward the king's messengers</li> <li>f. The king's treatment of his unworthy subjects</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>g. Those who were invited second</li> <li>h. The king's servants who issued the second invitation</li> <li>i. The wedding garment</li> <li>j. The unprepared wedding guest</li> <li>k. The king's arrival to see his guests</li> </ol>
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18. What is the meaning of the allusion to "outer darkness"? Where is this place?
19. What is the meaning of "the weeping and gnashing of teeth," that is, who has the eyes to weep and the teeth to gnash, and what sentiment are they expressing when they do this?
20. According to Jesus' story, why is it that *many are called, but few chosen*? Indicate the specific failures Jesus pointed out that caused the rejection of the many.

## SECTION 58

### JESUS ANSWERS CAPTIOUS QUESTIONS

#### A. QUESTION OF TRIBUTE TO CAESAR

(Parallels: Mark 12:13-22; Luke 20:20-26)

TEXT: 22:15-22

15 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might ensnare him in *his* talk. 16 And they sent to him their disciples, with the Herodians, saying, Teacher, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, and carest not for any one: for thou regardest not the person of men. 17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not? 18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why make ye trial of me, ye hypocrites? 19 Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a denarius. 20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? 21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. 22 And when they heard it, they marvelled, and left him, and went away.

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. In the splendid compliments the Pharisees' disciples gave Jesus, are they telling the truth? Is there any statement in their estimate of His ministry and personal life that is false? If you think their words are their honest evaluation of our Lord, how do you account for Jesus' unhesitatingly negative reaction to them? Do you think it possible to hide hatred and malice in such apparently generous praise? If so, how does this work?

- b. Do you think that Jewish nationalism versus Roman domination was the only motive behind the Jews' question to tribute to Caesar, even if it were the one most obvious? To what extent would covetousness and greed be involved? Do you think the Jews wanted to keep their tribute money only for political reasons, and not also for personal use?
- c. Do you think that the Old Testament Law covered the problem these Pharisees present Jesus here? If so, what texts lead you to this conclusion?
- d. How was Jesus' request to be shown a denarius an integral part of His answer to their challenging question? What did their possession of (or easy access to) a denarius have to do with their own politically compromised position that in turn validated the truth of His final answer?
- e. How did Jesus' principle not only answer their questions but actually defuse the explosive political implications of their dilemma?
- f. What is the difference between their formulation of the question and Jesus' answer? They said, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?" He answered, "Pay Caesar what is Caesar's." Or do you see any difference between what each said? If so, what is it?
- g. Since the Pharisees are normally a religious sect, why should they here resort to political questions, when they could have brought up religious ones? Do you think they felt themselves at a disadvantage in the religious field trying to combat with Jesus? What possible advantage could they hope for in a political approach such as this?
- h. What do you see was particularly effective about the method Jesus used in this story? Instead of answering their question directly, He requested a denarius. In what way did He render His own answer so far more memorable to His original listeners by doing this? What may we learn from His way of handling this situation?
- i. What criteria would you list that help us to distinguish what is God's from what is Caesar's?
- j. To what extent is Jesus' answer binding on Christian consciences today? What must a Christian do when his own government is bad, i.e. follows anti-Christian policies by creating laws that violate the Christian conscience? Should we then continue to render Caesar what Caesar claims? What Biblical teachings are specifically given to cover this particular case?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then the Pharisees went out and plotted together how to trap Jesus in the course of conversation. So they kept Him under surveillance and sent their secret agents to Him, some of them disciples of the Pharisees themselves and some of them supporters of Herod's party. These pretended to be men devoted to righteousness. They hoped to lead Him to say something that might be useful to them so they could deliver Him up to the jurisdiction and authority of the Roman governor.

So they approached Him and asked, "Rabbi, we are convinced that you are a man of integrity, and that you speak and teach God's way sincerely and correctly. You are not afraid of anyone and you show no partiality for anyone. You honestly and truly teach what God wants men to know. So, give us your ruling on the following question: according to God's Law is it right to give taxes or tribute to the Roman Emperor or not? Should we do it or not? Yes or no?"

Jesus, however, aware of their malice, detected their hidden motives and challenged them, "Why do you hypocrites set this trap for me? Hand me a denarius—the money for the tax. Let me look at it!"

When they handed Him a denarius, Jesus quizzed them, "Whose image and inscription are on this coin?"

"Caesar's" was their answer.

"That's fine," the Lord went on, "So pay Caesar what belongs to him and pay God what belongs to Him!"

So they were unable to trap Him in any of His public utterances. Rather, when they heard His reply, they were taken by surprise. Disoriented by His answer, they held their tongues and simply left Him and retreated.

## SUMMARY

Determined opposition attempted to trap Jesus by remote control, using their own disciples posing as sincere seekers after truth, a deliberately mixed group composed of political conservatives and liberals. They attempted to blind Him with flattery as a smokescreen for their politically explosive question, "Should the control of Caesar over our lives be admitted by free men under God?" He parried their thrust by showing how thoroughly they already accepted the Emperor's influence, then brought balance to the question by specifying the proper sphere of influence rightly occupied by God and the State respectively.

## NOTES

## I. A QUESTION TO TRAP THE TEACHER (22:15-17)

22:15 **Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might ensnare him in this talk.** Bested at their own game of "Embarrassing Questions," they beat a hasty retreat (Mark 12:12) to seek advice from fellow Sanhedrinists on further strategy against the Galilean. Although Matthew's account appears at first glance to blame only the Pharisees for the plotting that hatched the political attack, the Synoptists all agree that "the chief priests" (= Sadducees) are as surely involved as the Traditionalists (Matt. 21:45; Luke 20:19f.; cf. Mark 11:27; 12:1, 12f., where "they" seems always to refer to the "chief priests, scribes and elders"). Even though the Pharisees may have taken counsel among their own at first, as the sequel proves, it was essential that they bring together representatives of politically contrasting views in order to make their trap work.

That the Pharisees should have been so keenly involved in a politically oriented ambush makes sense, if it be remembered that they were not merely or only concerned with "specifically religious matters (so far as they can ever be detached), but for the proper ordering of the whole of society" (Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*, 21). Their hope of making holiness possible for all Israel would necessarily affect their understanding of the political football involved in the tribute questions they direct to Jesus. In fact, if Israel is to function as a holy people under God, must it not be free from foreign hindrance? In the popular mind this must exclude Rome's domination. Therefore, the Pharisees' popular, sympathetic contact with the people with whom they enjoyed extensive influence and from whom they received considerable support (cf. *Ant.* XVIII, 1,3,4; XIII,10,6), would appear to guarantee these sectaries' power to punish Jesus unmercifully, if He made the politically suicidal choice of espousing the unpopular Roman tribute.

22:16 **And they send to him their disciples.** Desperately struggling to recover the initiative, the ringleaders remained in the background. They ran in a team of understudies, perhaps hoping that Jesus would not recognize these younger men as their henchmen. Luke's word for these Pharisean henchmen is "spies who pretended to be sincere" that is, men paid to set up the ambush. Their cover consisted in their pretense to be sincere.

The second essential component in this ambush was the Herodians, supporters of the Roman puppet government of Herod Antipas.

Because the Herods enjoyed their right to rule by the grace of Rome, the Herodians were essentially a pro-Roman political position. These would naturally favor the Roman tribute.

Some commentators see this combination of politicians as strange and ironic. This, because the Pharisees pretended high piety and endeavored to sidestep every contact with the ceremonial contamination of others, and because the Herodians were not at all concerned about keeping God's holy law. The common virulent hatred for Jesus, felt by Herodians and Pharisees alike, had now reached such a white-hot intensity that they temporarily forgot their mutual enmities and formed this temporary unholy alliance to stop Him.

However, it is not at all ironic that Pharisees should have willingly set this political trap. It is a historical misjudgment to perceive of the Pharisees as being TOTALLY uninterested in political questions, because, earlier, they had defied widely held public opinion by not swearing their goodwill to Caesar and his government (*Ant.*, XVII,2,4). And they suffered for it.

So, the Herodians belonged in this plot, because Jesus' denunciations undeniably targeted their purely materialistic concerns too (22:5; 21:38). Further, these supporters of Herodian political rule could see nothing but trouble in the Messianic royalty implied in Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He had seriously disturbed the status quo whereby these fawning sycophants of Herodian rulers retained their position and influence. So, all the vested interests in the nation stand to lose, if the Galilean Prophet is not stopped and soon! This seemingly "unlikely alliance" is perfectly explicable in terms of sheer political expediency and dovetails neatly with the secret, devious ways the Pharisees and Herodians had shown in cooperating earlier (Mark 3:6) and against which Jesus warned (Mark 8:15). Both recognized that in this situation He could harm them worse than either of them could harm the other. Their only unity here is their common hatred and fear of the rabbi from Nazareth.

**Teacher, we know that thou art true.** Because they were about to place Jesus in the position of judge, it was important to affirm the judge's personal character as qualification for that function. Because teachers in Israel knew God's Law best, they naturally qualified as judges over all questions that concerned Israel's duty either personal or collective. **Thou teachest the way of God in truth.** Although among

other nations this would not be a judge's qualification, in Israel this was a prime consideration, because the Law of God was the supreme standard of judgment. He dare not teach his own dream or vision, but the way God prescribes for men in truth! **Thou carest not for any one** does not mean He is indifferent or unconcerned about others. Rather, they mean that a magistrate cannot take into consideration whether the person judged is wealthy or destitute, influential or a nobody. (Cf. I Sam. 16:7; Lev. 19:15; Exod. 23:3, 6.) Nor may he fear personal consequences from the verdict he renders against one side or the other. Truth and impartiality must be his primary concern (Deut. 1:16, 17; 10:17; Prov. 24:23ff.). He must not care who is opposed to his final ruling, be it even the Emperor himself (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 16:18-20; 1:17; Mal. 2:9)! **Thou regardest not the person of men.** While a judge must take into consideration a man's character, he must not be influenced by his money, influence or position. (Study Acts 10:34; Gal. 2:6; James 2:1-12; I Peter 1:17 where "respector of persons" means "partial.") In short, this high praise intends to describe a great and godly teacher. They picture a rabbi of unassailable integrity and honesty, one who is immune to blackmail, the precise opposite of an opportunist.

This new strategy stands in contrast with the authorities' earlier attack. There they had challenged His authority from their position of official dignity. Here they pretend to bow humbly to His authority, trusting His integrity. But this is escalation, not retreat, because few are the men who, while courageously and ably defending their position against all assailants, can withstand the subtler danger of warm praise. But these apparently earnest, courteous compliments were triply treacherous:

1. The common people standing there listening, unaware of any sinister motive, could not have guessed that the apparently sincere people who make these positive public declarations of confidence in Jesus, would ever mean Him harm. This disarmed any popular resistance to the attack.
2. They hoped to disarm Jesus Himself in the process. They calculated His hard, countable results to be few and far between (discounting, of course, the mob enthusiasm of the triumphal entry), so He NEEDED public recognition by someone like these friendly, potential disciples. So, if they could just say a few kind words that anyone in His shoes would be straining to hear, hopefully they would succeed in setting the fatal trap while He suspected nothing.

3. By laying particular emphasis on Jesus' courageous stand taken in the past without fear or favor against the rich and influential by His bold denunciations of their corruption and sins, these "hit-men" hope to push Jesus into taking the fatal dare to come out fearlessly either against Rome or against His own nation.

22:17 **Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou?** On the basis of His claim to speak God's message, they freely expect Him to act in character as a typical rabbi accustomed to resolving difficult questions of conscience and duty. He could not now refuse their question without discrediting Himself as a Teacher.

When Matthew states that the questioners are Pharisees and Herodians, does he imply that this fact was revealed as part of their approach and question? Farrar (*Life*, 522) says yes: "They evidently designed to raise the impression that a dispute had occurred between them and the Herodians, and that they desired to settle it by referring the decision of the question at issue to the final and higher authority of the Great Prophet." However, if their purpose was to keep their relative positions and interest in the question unknown to Him, so as to make their trap function better, these men probably presented themselves as strangers to Jesus. Matthew only informs his readers what he learned later about their true political colors.

In order to execute Jesus, His enemies must secure the consent of the local Roman authorities (John 18:31). However, they yet have no legal basis to accuse Him, unless some compromising statement of His could enflame the Romans. The Jewish authorities are not averse to stoning Him themselves, even without prior authorization, were the conditions right (cf. John 5:18; 7:1, 19, 25; 8:59; 10:31; 11:8). What prompts their hesitation here is His powerful public image and extraordinary popularity. The Jewish authorities must deflect from themselves all responsibility for His removal, so they could survive the furor that might erupt over His elimination.

**Is it lawful?** (*éxestin*) asks: "Is it permitted, possible or proper?" (Arndt-Gingrich, 274), but the basis of judgment for God's people is ever the Law and will of God. Because these men's pretended interest in Jesus' teaching the way of God truthfully, this question means: "According to you, what does God's Law require of us on this subject?" They care not whether other peoples should pay it, but *is it lawful* for GOD'S PEOPLE to pay it? **Is it lawful?** in

this context, intends to force Jesus into a three-way bind, because He may not answer according to some political expedient forged for a given period but which might conceivably be altered as conditions change. Not only must He avoid offending the Romans while satisfying the Jewish nationalists. He must answer to God, truth and righteousness.

The **tribute to Caesar** in question was a poll-tax to be paid to the imperial treasury, instituted in Judea when Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, was deposed in A.D. 6 (*Ant.* XVIII,1,1; 2:1; cf. *Matt.* 2:22). Because the tax was not one denarius, it was not excessive, being equivalent to one day's work of a common day-laborer. Rather, it was galling because it was Roman, the tangible expression of foreign domination of God's people. More than one Jew who paid this tribute was unsure of the basis on which supporting a pagan government could be defended. Several factors contributed to this confusion:

1. In the Mosaic legislation God had not spelled out His will for His people when they became subjects of foreign powers, so no Old Testament text could be cited. True, various prophets had addressed themselves to specific situations, but what should Israel do in Jesus' day? THAT was the issue. The whole debate revolved around the contradiction between ideal Israel (under God alone) and actual Israel (under Caesar too), or between what seemed to be prophesied for Israel and what Israel suffered under Rome at the time. Although Mosaic legislation had decreed that Israel must establish as king over them only men of Hebrew descent, the choice must be God's appointment (*Deut.* 17:14f.). Since the close of the Old Testament no genuine prophet had arisen to indicate the Lord's choice and anoint His appointee (cf. *I Macc.* 14:41; 4:46).
2. Before Christ's coming the Jewish people had been conquered various times by pagan peoples and had been forced to pay them tribute. Naturally, this subjugation bred its deeply-felt bitterness and fiercely proud resentment toward the occupying powers, be they Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek or Roman. As a result of these invariably heathen influences in the national life, there arose religious patriots at various intervals who fomented political revolution. They preached holy war against the pagans as God's will. Engaging in terrorist activities, they sowed terror in the land. Their war-cry was "No King but Jahvé! No Law but the Torah!" (Cf. *Ant.* XVIII,1,1,6; *Wars*, II,8,1.)

3. One of the great ironies of Jewish history especially in this context is that around 4 B.C. the Jews sent their best ambassadors to plead with Caesar to establish ROMAN government over them in decided preference to semi-Jewish Herodian rule! (*Ant.* XVII,11, 1-2; and again in 6 A.D., *Ant.* XVII,13,1-2,5; XVIII,1,1) And, if they had requested it, should they not also pay for it?

So, the Pharisees' baited trap was a vexed question at the center of furious debate in Israel. (Cf. Judas the Galilean's bloody revolt over this issue.) So, it is misguided to refer to this issue as a purely political question and not a religious issue, because in the ideal theocracy of Israel, what is political can very well be a highly religious issue too. The tragedy here is that the question is legitimate, but the questioners do not really care about His answer. They only intend to push Jesus to make a fatal commitment.

The trap is now set and the designated victim incited to walk into it. The instigators add further pressure by demanding a straightforward yes or no answer (Mark 12:15). In their repeated question there is the urgency of spiritual anxiety: "Shall we pay or not?" to push Him into the deadly two-way trap of positive self-commitment either way.

1. Should He opt for paying Roman taxes, the Pharisean contingent could shout to the four winds that the Galilean prophet had given the nod to paying the hated pagan tax. Thus He would be black-balled as impious toward God and unpatriotic, a traitor to Israel, the people of God. Any hope that He might be the great Messianic King must then be laughed off as absurd. He would instantly alienate many of His Galilean disciples and infuriate the Zealots whose violent nationalism would explode. These would perhaps destroy Him themselves, leaving the national leaders unscathed to run the country in relative calm.
2. If He chose the popular, nationalistic position that tax-paying to the oppressor was tantamount to unfaithfulness to God—the option they hoped He would choose (Luke 20:20)—the pro-Roman Herodian group could carry His pronouncement directly to the Roman governor, Pilate. The pragmatic Romans did not concern themselves with the religious questions of a subject people so long as that nation behaved itself and paid its taxes. (Cf. Acts 18:15f.) But to declare in favor of non-payment of Roman tribute is an audacious declaration of independence, hence a treasonable offense against Rome. The Jewish leadership was so confident that this

accusation would move Pilate that they falsely accused Jesus of declaiming against the tax (Luke 23:1f.). They well knew that Pilate's policy of reckless tyranny had a low combustion point, especially toward dangerous subversives or those who might be suspected of being revolutionaries (cf. Luke 13:1).

Their formulation of the dilemma is clear: either one must be a rebel against Rome and a true, Jewish patriot, or else a traitor to Israel and a Roman puppet. They were certain that there could be no acceptable third alternative. Their dilemma, however, is badly formed, because it wrongly assumes that one cannot have both Israel and Rome, both God and Caesar. Essentially, Jesus' debating tactic will consist in nothing more complicated than disposing of their false dichotomy by showing that a reasonable third alternative exists which embraces the best parts of both extremes.

## II. A COUNTER-TRAP (22:18-20)

22:18 **But Jesus perceived their wickedness.** Does *wickedness* here mean their motives, which only God can know, or their result, which anyone could perceive? That is, did He *perceive their wickedness* by omniscience or by normal godly insight? This latter is the more interesting choice for us, because it reveals that evil is self-defeating! Jesus *perceived their wickedness*, not only or merely by His power of supernatural insight to expose their clever plotting (cf. Acts 5:1-11), but because of the unintended truth spoken by these very hypocrites. He really was all that they said!

1. Because He was a man of integrity, i.e. "true." His genuine humility would instantly sense how sharply the grotesqueness and absurdity of their high-sounding compliments lavished on Him contrasted with His own view of Himself. The fact that they were, in His eyes, unqualified to judge Him even favorably, disqualified their praise and warned Him.
2. Because He taught the way of God in truth, He breathed the same air as Jeremiah and John the Baptist and all the other great prophets whose clear vision of Israel's uniqueness in the world always included appropriate disclaimers of any Jewish spiritual superiority and exclusive privilege. For all of these prophets, including the Nazarene, the timely use of evil foreign powers to chasten Israel and prepare her to accomplish her Messianic mission was not at

all beyond God's range of options (II Chron. 12:8; Habakkuk). From this perspective, Roman government, Roman taxes and Jewish submission are not the mutually exclusive options implied in the text question now before Jesus. His knowledge of God's will expressed in Hebrew history saved Him.

3. Because He really did not show partiality to anyone or pay attention to a person's rank, He could actually look past their great show of respect and discern their need for correction. They ranked themselves among His would-be disciples, as sincere seekers after truth. But, unbeknown to them, Jesus did not even show partiality for His own followers! He could challenge their basic presuppositions with as much equanimity as that with which He battled those of His opponents. (Cf. John 3:1-12; Matt. 15:12f.; 16:5-12, 21-23; 17:16-21; chapter 18; 19:10-15, 23—20:16, 20-28, etc.) So, His dispassionate impartiality saved Him.

His pure spirit recoiled from this fumbling appeal to His pride. He thirsted, not for the paltry praise of ignorant men, but for that approval that comes from GOD ALONE (John 5:44).

**Why make ye trial of me, ye hypocrites?** In their question our Master could sense something more than the latent nationalism burning in the people who usually pondered this problem. These questioners, rather, exposed their lack of integrity by demanding that He commit Himself first on an obviously loaded and politically dangerous question that could not fail to call down wrath upon Him regardless of which option He selected. This is no free, academic discussion about the meaning of God's Law. It is a frame-up pure and simple! So Jesus called their hand, shattering their carefully constructed illusion. *You hypocrites* is a just sentence, because there was no correlation between what they were thinking or planning and what they were saying publicly. So, by unmasking them instantly, He proved to the gullible bystanders that His enemies' cleverness had not deceived Him. By suddenly attacking as *hypocrites* those whom the unsuspecting might judge to be friends and potential disciples, the Lord surprised everyone, causing them to give far more attention to the reasons behind this unexpected move. So doing, He demonstrated personally what it means to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (10:16).

22:19 **Show me the tribute money** means: "Bring me the legal coin with which the tax is paid." Mark adds: "Let me look at it." There is a flicker of humor here, because, although the dilemma was already

resolved by the coin's common circulation in Palestine, Jesus called for the coin as if He must carefully ponder the question. The point is really that **THEY TOO** must look at it, because it contained irrefutable proof of His conclusion. To ask for the legal coin they knew meant, "Bring me a denarius" (Mark 12:15; Luke 20:24). Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 802) affirms that the denarius was minted specifically for this tax. While Jewish and even Greek coins might be used in everyday business, all knew that the Roman tribute must be paid with Roman money. But, by demanding Roman money, Jesus asked for a coin bearing the image and inscription of Caesar, and consequently, representing his authority. Thus, He cocked His counter-trap.

**And they brought unto him a denarius**, apparently having no trouble finding the right coin. Its commonness in the Palestine of Jesus' day is well illustrated. (Cf. Matt. 18:28; 20:2, 9f., 13; Mark 6:37; 14:5; Luke 7:41; 10:35; John 6:7; 12:5.) The Jews' relation to Caesar and his institutions, including the current monetary system, was not so tenuous and distant as they would believe after all. Rather, whether or not they were carrying in their own purses the very coin of the realm, the damning proof that they themselves had tacitly accepted the reality, if not also the benefits of Caesar's rule, is that the coin was current in their country. The fact that **they brought him a denarius** need not be construed to mean that they necessarily had to go some distance (e.g. to the money-changers) to find and return with the requested coin, as if they would not have carried heathen money with him. After all, the Herodians are present, and they reek of paganism: this is why they are there! In fact, all attention is focused on what the Prophet would do with the coin, rather than on the fact that they were caught using Caesar's money in Israel.

**22:20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?** What an exciting piece of showmanship! His request for the coin already attracted everyone's attention, but this question now raises their level of curiosity about how He would handle this tense situation. But what keen-witted diplomacy! He began by asking them to identify the coin's image and inscription. His approach was neither due to ignorance on His part nor merely to gain time, but because He could thereby better expose the illogic of their stance. The coin bore stamped on it the answer to their own question.

**Whose is this image and superscription?** Because the Law had forbidden the making of images, most Jewish coins bore no human picture, just a design with an inscription.

After the time of Christ, Herod Agrippa (47-44 A.D.) struck coins bearing the head of the emperor with the title of Augustus in Greek. Also Agrippa II (48-100 A.D.) issued coins with Nero's head as well as that of Agrippa (*I.S.B.E.*, III,2079b). After Jerusalem's fall this same ruler even issued coins with a DEITY on the reverse side! (*ibid.*, 2080b)

Even Roman coins intended for circulation in Palestine were coined without the emperor's image by concession to this Jewish scruple (Farrar, *Life*, 524). But as Providence would have it, the very coin they brought to Jesus that day was a completely Gentile piece, in that it bore both the *image and superscription* (Edersheim, *Life*, II,386). So, right in Jerusalem, God's holy City, the considerations of business pressures and personal convenience had quietly brushed aside scruples against using these "ungodly, pagan coins."

Whether they saw it immediately or not, His question implied a recognized principle: the power to define legal money belongs to the State. Consequently, that government which can declare what constitutes legal tender for the payment of all debts, public and private, is the government which is commonly recognized as legitimate and having the right to rule. The making and financial backing of coins is one of the areas wherein the State most obviously represents the interest of the citizens. They must see that they could not consistently refuse to pay the tax that enabled the government to guarantee their own economic system, while at the same time making use of Tiberius' coins as a medium of exchange. *This image and superscription* implied not only Caesar's right to coin money, but his right to organize the economic world, a right that the circulation of his money involved and implied. Although belonging to Caesar, the coin Jesus held up was employed as a medium of exchange by people all over the empire without any relationship to their religious or political leanings. Their use of it as legal tender implied their concession to Rome's political claim to organize Mediterranean world economics.

It is not a side issue to notice that the inscription on that denarius read": TI[berius] CAESAR DIVI AUG[usti] F[ilius] AUGUSTUS" or "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the deified Augustus," virtually ascribing godhood to the emperor in violation of Jewish religious convictions that no human being could pretend to be a god. Jesus' final dictum (v. 21), while not implying any criticism of their using coins bearing images of the emperor and his blasphemous titles, definitely condemns the idolatry involved in worship of the images

themselves or in confessing the content of the inscriptions. The reverse side of the denarius portrayed a seated figure with the inscription: PONTIF[ex] MAXIM[us], or "Highest Priest" or religious head of the State.

### III. THE THEOLOGY OF DOUBLE TAXATION (22:21)

22:21 **They say unto him, Caesar's.** Whether or not they could have surmised where He would go with their answer, evasion and denial were impossible. Plainly visible on the coin was the image and inscription of Tiberius, the then-reigning Caesar (A.D. 14-37; cf. Luke 3:1). Jesus' point is not so much that this particular coin is Caesar's as the right to coin is his. He does not mean Ceasar personally, but his office and function.

Jesus went straight to the heart of the reality and stripped away perplexities from this perennial problem that had troubled many conscientious Jews for centuries and had sparked controversy as useless as it was endless. In one simple, concise sentence He clarified the issue so logically and so universally that His questioners appear foolish for not having seen it first.

#### A. Man's Relationship to the State

1. *Render unto Caesar.* Jesus' attackers had asked, "Shall we give tribute unto Caesar (*doûnai kênson Kaisari*)?" Although *didômi*, when used in contexts involving taxes, tribute, rent and the like, should be rendered "pay," its usual meaning is "give." (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 191ff.) Nevertheless, because Jesus Himself does not use their term in His answer, but rather the intensified form, *apodidômi*, He implies a subtle verbal contrast between their word and His. Accordingly, their question means, "Is it right to GIVE taxes to Caesar?" and He retorts, PAY BACK Caesar and God what is their right." Your tribute is no voluntary gift as your question implies. You are paying back the Roman government money you legally and morally owe for every benefit and advantage that this regime provides its subjects.
2. *The things that are Caesar's.* What does this involve?
  - a. Both Jesus and Paul explain that *what is Caesar's* has been delegated to him by God in the first place. (Rom. 13:1; John 19:11; Study Ps. 82:1, 6 in connections with Exod. 21:6; 22:8f., 28 and

John 10:34f. Had the Jews forgotten Dan. 2:21, 37f.; 4:17, 24-32; 5:21, 23?) The political irony of the historical situation in which the first century Hebrew nation found itself was the fact that God had not intervened to free them from Roman domination. It could be argued, therefore, that it was at least His permissive will that this domination continue to exist. Even king Agrippa argued similarly (*Wars*, II,16,4).

Could any Jew seriously affirm that Rome's liberal policy toward the Jewish faith interfered with its free exercise? Had not Rome rectified the controversy over the images? (*Ant.* XVIII,3,1; *Wars*, II,10) Had not Rome recalled and banished Archelaus? (*Ant.* XVII,13,1-5) Was not even Jewish religion solicitous of the Emperor's good health and government by virtue of the sacrifices offered on his behalf? (*Wars*, II,10,4; 17:2) Did not even the Jewish authorities themselves distinctly admit that the acceptance and use of a sovereign's coin was tantamount to recognizing his sovereignty? (Edersheim, *Life*, II,385, cites Babha K.113a and Jer.Sanh. 20b) This was not unlikely based on earlier practice (I Macc. 15:6). In fact, Jewish independence from Rome was celebrated by coins blatantly celebrating the first Jewish revolt (66-70 A.D.) Later, Bar-Cochba's revolt spawned a new series of Jewish shekels around 132-135 A.D. (*Davis Dictionary of the Bible*, 512) Jesus too had expressed the common understanding that taxes were leveled upon subject people (Matt. 17:25f.). For Jews, therefore, to pay Caesar's head-tax meant that they thereby admitted his political lordship, an admission they later shouted to Pilate (John 19:15).

Insofar as the political government does not interfere with the activities and adoration of God and His people, there is no violation of religious liberty in the paying of revenue to the State to pay for goods and services on behalf of the taxed. Money must come from somewhere to pay for law and order, to build highways for ready access to the entire empire, to construct harbors and public buildings. God expects His people to help pay for the whole realm of governmental activity whereby the State benefits all its citizens by good laws, the protection of civil and religious rights and the general administration of justice. This is

- no gift to Caesar, but a legal and moral obligation. Can it be right to accept the advantages of orderly government and yet be unwilling to pay the cost of them?
- b. Jesus' word is the State's charter that guarantees its right to function. It also condemns every conniving attempt of tyrannous churchmen to usurp the State's authority. Duty to God recognizes the sphere of obedience to State law too (Rom. 13:1-10; I Tim. 2:1f.; I Peter 2:13-17).
  - c. But we must *render ONLY the things that are Caesar's* to him, nothing more. Jesus' second dictum demands this limitation. (Cf. the position taken by Daniel and his three friends: Dan. 1:3-16; 3:16-18, 28; 6:1-27.)

### B. Man's Relationship to God

1. But the first is that we must be religious about paying our taxes! Obedience to God means to respond conscientiously and positively to His ministers who are attending to this very thing (Rom. 13:5-7). There is a direct chain of command running from God down to the common citizen, a chain which runs right through the hands of the governing authorities of the land. Recognition of this reality should take all the sting out of paying "all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due." From this point of view, to *render unto Caesar* IS to *render unto God what is God's!* There is no necessary conflict of responsibility between God and the State:
2. The crisis of conscience arises for the believer only when Caesar thinks that he is god and begins to require that we render unto Caesar the things that are God's. Despite Jehovah's Witnesses' protestations to the contrary, Christ has not established a theocracy wherein we must render unto God what is Caesar's. The Kingdom of God and the State are not essentially in competition.

At this juncture we must face the dilemma of Acts 4:19 and 5:29. The Lord does not suggest that no situations would ever arise where the choice would be the State over against God. In fact, many such occasions have arisen in Church history when wicked rulers have persecuted and slaughtered God's people for refusal to render to Caesar what belongs to God, their highest loyalty and worship. (Study Revelation 13.) Such times call for resolute refusal

- to submit to this pagan worship and the choice of death to compromise. God has already demonstrated His sovereign might against rulers who claimed His rights (Acts 12:10-23; Dan. 4, 5; Isa. 36, 37). And He will do so again (Rev. 16:6; 19:11-21; 20:7-15)!
3. The doctrine of separation of Church and State is solidly rooted in Jesus' declaration. Our Lord did not demand unquestioning submission to all tyrants whatever their requirements, because this would render it absolutely impossible to *render unto God the things that are God's*. His latter demand places the freedom of conscience and the Church above every secular claim. But only bad, wrong-headed exegesis could ever justify the conclusion that our Lord left the respective spheres of influence of God and of Caesar as so separate that God's will cannot interfere with the Christian citizen's relationship and duty to the State. ("Religion and politics do not mix!") Rather, the State could not exist or function without God's permission and it is responsible to Him for the exercise of its proper functions. The child of God must always act in harmony with God's will therefore, even when he serves as a citizen of the State. God is ABOVE the State, not sharing equal time with it!
4. Jesus' sharp distinction between God and Caesar denounces all forms of Caesar—worship. Any godless political philosophy that would deify the State must reckon with Jesus' spiritual demand: *and to God!* Although His questioners could object that His reply evades what they considered the real issue, His word was clear and definite enough to uphold the principle of the State and civil government. His view of the abuses of the Roman state is more clearly and concretely expressed elsewhere. (See notes on 20:20-28.) For Jesus, the ruthless exercise of raw power, or power for power's sake, is Satanic. In His eyes, all ambition to become great and to maintain power by arbitrary and oppressive rule is to be decisively rejected and steadfastly resisted by His disciples. Only humble, useful service is the path to true greatness and proper dominion. (See notes on Matt. 18.)

#### IV. THE TRAPPERS GIVE UP (22:22)

**22:22** And when they heard it, they marvelled, and left him and went away. Despite their hostility, His attackers could not miss the fact that, not only had He deftly eluded their clever trap, but, more importantly, He had brilliantly resolved a hotly-debated issue with

one clear pithy pronouncement that, because of its profoundness and simplicity, really left no phase of the issue untouched. With unimpeachable wisdom He had adroitly outmaneuvered them, avoiding political entanglements and, in the same stroke, He left them responsible to both God and Caesar!

To those multitudes who yearned for a political Messiah who would establish an earthly Kingdom of God and launch a violent revolt against Rome, this answer of Jesus was highly disappointing. He did not denounce Rome outright nor repudiate the tribute. This is a tacit admission of Rome's continued right to demand it, a confession of Rome's right to rule over Israel. In this, He stood on the side of the Herodians. This compromise would have damned Him in the eyes of the Zealots and tarnished His image in the mind of all partisans longing for independence.

*They marvelled.* True, Jesus had refused to bow before the worldly-minded ambitions of wrong-headed patriots months before (John 6:14f.). Among His own disciples He had found and denounced political ambition (Matt. 20:20-28) and exposed its misguided principles (18:1-35). But it was precisely this immunity to flattery that left His attackers open-mouthed. They could not imagine a man who, in their view, so desperately needed hard, countable results and eager supporters (as they pretended to be), but who, at the same time, could be so immune to their flattery! Did not every man have his price? Further, they just could not fathom how anyone could propose to establish his own kingdom while demanding loyalty to the existing State. This completely baffled these materialists. He was clearly not their kind of Messiah. (Praise God!)

But why did they leave Jesus? A Teacher who had so quickly avoided their trap and who taught eternal truth with such finesse could perhaps teach them more. Perhaps He who so dexteriously solved this long-standing puzzle, could lead them into the secrets of life's other problems. But they have no interest in learning; only in destroying Him. Rather than stay to grow in His light, they simply *left him and went away.*

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What religious group led in this attack?
2. Why was another party brought into this question, even though

- they were the political enemies of the others? How could their presence create significant trouble for Jesus?
3. Matthew informs us that they sent their "disciples" to present Jesus this question. How does Luke explain this particular choice? How would sending "disciples" help them achieve their goal?
  4. Quote the fine introduction these disciples made to Jesus. Show how these words, in and of themselves, accurately picture our Lord.
  5. Now explain why such true words could hide the malice that Jesus exposed in His reaction to them.
  6. Explain the background of the question posed to Jesus, showing how there could ever have arisen such a problem. What is the tribute involved here?
  7. In what did their trap consist? Show the ingenuity of their plot.
  8. What was Jesus' first reaction to their approach?
  9. What was the first answer He gave to their question? How did this pave the way for His second, final answer?
  10. What is a "denarius"? How did their having one in common use help Jesus' argument?
  11. What basic principle did Jesus appeal to in answer to their original question?
  12. Show how the Jews were unable to evade the truth of His answer.
  13. What was the effect of Jesus' answer on His questioners?
  14. What did the questioners do next?

## B. THE QUESTION OF THE RESURRECTION

(Parallels: Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-39)

TEXT: 22:23-33

23 On that day there came to him Sadducees, they that say that there is no resurrection: and they asked him, 24 saying, Teacher, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. 25 Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first married and deceased, and having no seed left his wife unto his brother; 26 in like manner the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. 27 And after them all, the woman died. 28 In the resurrection therefore whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. 29 But Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. 30 For

in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven. 31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, 32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not *the God* of the dead, but of the living. 33 And when the multitudes heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose that these Sadducees, whose normal interest is politics, should pose Jesus a religious question? What advantage could they hope for in such an attempt?
- b. Do you think this story about the wife and seven husbands had been used before this, or was it freshly invented to make Jesus and His doctrine look ridiculous?
- c. If you believe this story to be a stock Sadducean argument used with success against the Pharisees, how would you account for Pharisean failure to answer it once and for all?
- d. Is it ever a good idea to tell people frankly that they are wrong? Jesus did so here. And yet, does it not close people's minds to any further dialogue to make such a statement?
- e. Was it literally true that the Sadducees did not know the Scriptures? In what sense does Jesus mean His accusation of their ignorance? Were they (1) unlearned, (2) ignoring obvious truth, or (3) what? What did the Sadducees' theological position have to do with their ignorance?
- f. How does "the power of God" resolve the question posed by the Sadducees?
- g. What had the Old Testament indicated about the resurrection from the dead? Did the Old Testament furnish any reasons to believe in resurrection? If so, what are they? And, if so, what does this fact reveal about the Sadducees' attitude toward the Old Testament?
- h. What does the fact that "in the resurrection marriage does not exist" tell us about this present world, if anything?
- i. Since the text Jesus cited merely refers to God as "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," and never mentions resurrection, how can Jesus correctly conclude that the passage teaches resurrection from the dead? Is this a legitimate use of Scripture texts?

On what basis can He affirm that God "is not a God of the dead, but of the living," since the text cited does not say so? What is Jesus' thrust behind His quotation of Exodus 3:2-6? Is it (1) the verb? "I am" (present tense, see Luke), or (2) the predicate nominative: "the God of Abraham, etc."? How does Luke's addition, "For all live to him" furnish additional explanation that clarifies Jesus' point?

- j. Since the actual text in question is a quotation of words God directed to Moses, how can Jesus affirm: ". . . have you not read what was said TO YOU by God . . ."? There were nearly 1500 years of history intervening between the voice of God in the burning bush and Jesus' Sadducean listeners! In what sense did God say this expressly for these hearers?
- k. What do you think Jesus was trying to teach those Sadducees by affirming that it was God who was the author of the words cited from the pen of Moses? How does this revelation of Jesus resolve some modern doubts and "scholarly" uncertainties about Exodus' authorship?
- l. Since the Sadducees disbelieved in angels, how can Jesus safely allude to angels as He does, without fear that the Sadducees would reject His argument? Why do you think they dropped the subject of angels without debating it with Him? (What evidence could He have used from the Pentateuch to defend the truth they rejected?)
- m. What does it mean to be "like the angels in heaven"? What characteristics are to be shared with them? What information does Luke (20:36) provide to answer this?
- n. Why did not Jesus simply say, "Have you not read Exodus 3:6"? Why did He have to identify the desired passage by calling it "the passage about the bush"? (Cf. Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37.)
- o. What does this incident teach us about the importance of understanding the Bible correctly?
- p. How does this incident describe the life beyond the grave? Explain why, according to Luke 20:36, the resurrected dead can die no more. In what sense are the redeemed "the sons of God"? In what sense are they "sons of the resurrection"?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

That same day there came to Him some Sadducees. These people were saying they did not believe in life after death. They put the following

question to Him, "Teacher, Moses gave us a law: 'If a man dies, leaving a wife, but no heir, his brother must marry the widow and raise up a legal posterity for his dead brother.' Now there was a case in our community involving seven brothers. The first brother married a wife, but died, having no heir, thus leaving his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second brother. He married her, but died childless too. This was also the case with the third. Eventually all seven died leaving no posterity. Last of all, the woman herself died. In the resurrection—when the dead come back to life—to which of the seven brothers will she be wife? For they all had been married to her!"

"If not this why you are mistaken?" answered Jesus. "You do not understand either the Scriptures nor what God can do! Marriage is an institution limited to this world. But the men and women who are judged worthy to live in the next world (which implies their rising from the dead) will not marry but are like the angels in heaven. In fact, they cannot die anymore, because they are like heaven's angels. Reborn in the resurrection, they are God's sons!

"On the other hand, even Moses himself indicated that there is life after death. Have you never read in the book of Moses in that passage about the burning bush what God said to you when He spoke to Moses, saying, 'I am the GOD of Abraham, the GOD of Isaac and the GOD of Jacob'? This means that He is not the GOD of corpses but the GOD of living people! So, as far as God is concerned, they are all alive. You are quite mistaken!"

Even some of the theologians admitted, "Well said, Rabbi!" The common people who heard His teaching were deeply impressed by it.

## SUMMARY

The materialistic Sadducees who deny the world of the spirit and life after death approached Jesus with their stock catch-question seemingly based on Mosaic authority. Jesus revealed the fallacy of their presupposition that the after-life must simply continue this one in all respects, then expounded the meaning of Exodus 3:6 to show the reality of the spirit-world and man's intimate participation in it.

## NOTES

## I. THE PROBLEM: IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?

(22:23-28)

22:23 On that day there came to him Sadducees. On that day definitely connect this Sadducean assault with the foregoing attack. In contrast to the previous Pharisean strategy, the Sadducees now approach Jesus by themselves, since they alone denied the resurrection. The company of other sectarian groups would only frustrate their intention to subdue Jesus on a point He shared with the others.

**Sadducees, they that say that there is no resurrection.** On the views of these sectarians, see notes in Vol. III, 430-440; cf. Acts 23:6-8; especially Josephus, *Ant.* XIII,10,6; XVIII,1,4; XX,9,1; *Wars* II, 8,14. The Sadducees were a priestly party (cf. Acts 4:1, 2, 6; 5:17) that demanded that everything be understood rationally and not based on hearsay oral tradition. (Cf. Sepher Yosippon, *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan*, Bab. Talmud Pes. 57a; *Meg. Taan. Tebeth* 28, cited by Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*.) The basic attitude of this small but powerful faction was what might be termed "ecclesiastical opportunism," using religion for private gain. They apparently prided themselves on being no-nonsense, realistic people who based their philosophy on the common-sense view of this material world while considering anything metaphysical as a hypothetical superstition. They ended up with a religion without the supernatural.

But why would Matthew need to explain the particular belief of the Sadducees especially to his Jewish readers? Merely to clarify the point of the following contest of wits? Or had the Sadducees' aristocracy as a theological force in Israel disappeared by the time of the writing of Matthew's Gospel, a hypothesis calling for this historical note? Would not this, then, argue for a date after Jerusalem's fall for the compilation of Matthew's Gospel? This deduction is not necessary, if the following considerations be thought important:

1. The theological tenets of the less numerous Sadducees may not have been well-known among the common people in Israel, due to the superior hold on the popular mind enjoyed by the more orthodox Pharisees.
2. Further, if the Sadducees were interested in political power and the personal wealth that came with it far more than in

influencing the people through teaching their personal views, their skeptical views may have been only vaguely known by those outside political and academic circles.

So, Matthew reviewed their position briefly, in order to make the following conversation clear to the common reader, and this fact need not decide the question as to when it was written or argue for dating the book late in the first century after 70 A.D., or even later.

Their affirmation that *there is no resurrection* does not begin to exhaust Sadducean theology, as if they believed nothing more. In fact, this emphasis on the one point appears badly one-sided, since their fundamental problem was not only denial of resurrection *per se*, but also denial of every phase of the world of the spirit. Apparently, they reasoned that to deny resurrection is to be rid of the entire question of the spirit world, since resurrection is conceivably the door into that world. "Deny the door and you deny what is on the other side." Jesus' answer, then, consisted essentially in showing that those living people who are on the other side of death's barrier really exist, and that those involved in that life must have gotten there somehow, a fact that argues for the existence of the door. That is, once one admits the world of the spirit, resurrection is no longer impossible, because an Omnipotent God can work it all out with ease. So, the Sadducean belief that *there is no resurrection* is so much an intermediate issue that it is practically a side issue in contrast to the more fundamental question, the world of the spirit. But where did the Sadducees (and their modern counterparts) go wrong?

1. As with most controversies, not all the opposition is raised by plain fools. Sadducean debaters could have cited texts that seem to deny life after the grave, like Psalms 6:5; 88:10f.; 115:17; Ecclesiastes 9:4-10; Isaiah 38:18f. These seem to counterbalance other texts in its favor. However,—and more central to this discussion—the Sadducees held seriously defective view of much of the Old Testament. On Sadducean principles, only what was clearly stated in the written Law was held to be of binding authority, hence nothing could be cited outside the Pentateuch. Two reasons for this may be suggested:
  - a. The Mosaic code confirmed the authority of the priesthood. So the Law would be especially dear to the Sadducean priesthood. Because the prophets exposed the perversion of the hierarchical

aristocracy and preached the uselessness of ritual without righteousness, their writings would be particularly unwelcome.

- b. A concomitant reason may be that Pharisean glorification of hearsay evidence for doctrine had so elevated oral tradition to the level of divine law (cf. Matt. 15:6) that even men like the Sadducees instinctively felt they must be stopped. But how? The Sadducean reactionaries wrongly opted for strict adherence to Moses at the expense of the prophets. Their blunder consisted, then, in rejecting those divine messengers who revealed more of God's will than Moses included in the Law. Thus, all prophetic revelations after Moses were demoted to merely sanctified opinion and their information ignored.
2. Although many texts suggest resurrection or express the hope of life after death, it is not explicitly at the center of Judaism as a clearly defined doctrine until late in the prophets. But the erudite presumption often repeated that the concept of resurrection was "not known in Israel until just a century or so prior to the appearance of Jesus" must be abandoned. It simply ignores Abraham's bold faith, who steadfastly confided in the power of God to raise Isaac from the dead, rather than disbelieve God's promise of descendents through this his only son (Gen. 21:12; 22:1-18 interpreted by Heb. 11:19). Where did Abraham get that option? Does not this argue that resurrection was not only conceivable in Abraham's time but the very content of his hope nearly 2000 years before Christ? Let the scholars argue with Abraham!
3. It may also be that the Sadducees conceived of this theological development in Israel as wrong-headed because of the Pharisees' gross literalism which obscured the true glory of a resurrection concept. The Liberals went wrong by failing to recognize divine authority behind the prophets who revealed resurrection and by letting the Traditionalists' misunderstandings blind them to its truth.

So, because the resurrection doctrine was not explicitly stated in the Pentateuch and because the prophets' writings were abased to the level of questionable oral tradition, the Sadducees felt safe in declaring life after death to be without final authority. For them it was but a bad hypothesis not to be taken seriously.

Were these inquirers before Jesus simply ignorant, however sincere, men seeking to know truth from him? No, the spirit of their story is one of scoffing and their intent is to make the resurrection doctrine laughable and Jesus ridiculous with it. Why were they so embittered

by Jesus' ministry that they too should now commit their forces to attack Him?

1. Being largely priests and responsible for the Temple, the Sadducees' association was a sacerdotal aristocracy. They lost prestige when Jesus purified the Temple and felt personally flayed by His exposure of their corruption.
2. Similarly, their hostility was aroused because He had disturbed their profitable monopoly over the temple market. He had touched their purse!
3. These skeptics, whose one claim to fame was their denial of the world of spirits, supernatural messengers and life after death, were galled that the Galilean Prophet resurrected people from the dead in support of His claim to supernatural authority. (Study John 11:45-53, the ironic sequel to Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus: John 11:1-44; then note 12:9-11!)
4. The embarrassment and apparent incompetence of the Pharisees may have spurred the Sadducees to try their hand at stopping Jesus. Edersheim (*Life*, II,397) analyzes their motives:

Their object was certainly not serious argument, but to use the much more dangerous weapon of ridicule. Persecution the populace might have resented; for open opposition all would have been prepared; but to come with icy politeness and philosophic calm, and by a well-turned question to reduce the renowned Galilean Teacher to silence, and show the absurdity of His teaching, would have been to inflict on His cause the most damaging blow.

**22:24 Saying, Teacher,** they mock respect. By addressing Him thus, they exalt Him to a level of superiority, but they really intend to expose Him as sadly deficient, as an incompetent, a teller of tales and unworthy of Israel's following.

**Moses said:** they intend to establish their diabolical doctrine of no less a basis than the universally acknowledged law-giver himself. So doing, they state Israel's nation-wide acknowledgment of the Mosaic paternity of the passages involved. Although the Sadducees' quotation loosely follows the LXX of Deuteronomy 25:5f., it freely borrows wording from Genesis 38:8, which shows that they clearly had the case of Onan definitely in mind.

**If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up seed unto his brother.** (Cf. application in Ruth 4.) The

law of levirate (or "brother-in-law") marriage was designed to preserve the family line and heritage by continuing the principle of family lineage and by blocking the dispersion of the family patrimony. The children received the dead brother's property and in the genealogical record carried on his name rather than that of their physical parent.

By citing Moses, the Sadducees attempt to reinforce their argument, because, granted that the so-called future world is but the extension of this life's relationships, it is man's obedience to this Mosaic (= divine) ordinance that creates a situation that must necessarily lead to the absurdity of heavenly polygamy. Because the Sadducees cited not only Moses but also the language of Jacob himself, they doubly reinforce the implication that the Law and the patriarchs hold a view which must render absurd the resurrection concept, because of the heavenly conflict ensuing from its observance. Obviously, in their view, God would have to make an arbitrary choice, pleasing only one brother and turning heaven into hell for the rest!

**22:25 Now there were with us seven brethren.** Although this hypothetical case may sound fictitious, real life provides some most remarkable and highly exceptional cases, so who can successfully deny that the Sadducees had a real case in mind? Although debate had arisen in Judaism whether to apply the law in question beyond the third marriage (see Edersheim, *Life*, II,400 note 2), some stricter (Pharisean?) family may have actually carried out the law to its logical conclusion, even though some strange twist of fate doomed each of the woman's husbands, leaving her alone to live. *Seven brethren:* the problem would have been real with even fewer brothers, but *seven* serves to underline the problem more vividly. **The first married and deceased, and having no seed left his wife unto his brother.** Their *having no seed* is critical for the law, since the difficulty would have instantly been removed at any one of the levirate marriages to which a legal heir were born to continue the lineage of the first brother who died, leaving his wife and house without continuance. It also forestalls the possible answer that she would have been considered wife of the man to whom she had borne an heir.

**22:26 in like manner the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. 27 And after them all, the woman died.** Her death and consequent entrance into the realm of the dead is essential to the Sadducean argument, to create the domestic confusion they foresee as a necessary consequence of the resurrection doctrine.

**22:28 In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife shall she be of the**

**seven? for they all had her.** Their rationale behind this resulting conundrum is simple: how could a belief that produces so ridiculous a result be pronounced true? Because the Sadducees derided the resurrection doctrine, they were not really concerned whose wife the woman would be. But because Jesus believed in the resurrection, they pose Him a problem that would expose the disgusting extreme to which His position must lead, force Him to face it and declare them right.

What could the Sadducees have foreseen as Jesus' possible options?

1. "In the resurrection she would be the wife of all seven." In this case they could point out that this response teaches polyandry and creates confusion in God's original design for man, as Moses wrote in Genesis 2:16f. and 2:23f. Further, it contradicted His own teaching (Matt. 19:3-9).
2. "She would be the wife of the first brother alone for whom she raised up children." But they could answer, "But all the others had married her, therefore, she was wife also of each of them and they would have equal rights."
3. "There is no resurrection, so the difficulty does not exist." They would cheer, because He would have abandoned His own position and declared theirs valid.
4. Nor could He repudiate the law of levirate marriages, for it was the decree of God. To put it in doubt would cost Him His following among Bible-believing Israelites.
5. He could not reject the continuation of individual personality and personal relationships either, because these were an integral part of the commonly accepted resurrection doctrine.

Because they, like the Pharisees, could not envision a world to come different from the mere extension of this life and its relationships, they were arguing from wrong premises and expected Him to do the same. Their surprise came when He simply exploded their commonly accepted "world of tomorrow" concept. The Jews had imagined resurrection life in its crudest form, a caricature of the true. Jesus now explains it in a superior form, commending it for their reevaluation.

## II. THE SOLUTION: JESUS EXPOSES MATERIALISTS' IGNORANCE (22:29-32)

22:29 **But Jesus answered and said unto them.** The marvel is that He should condescend to respond to these perverse, frivolous triflers. It never escaped Him, however, that within learning distance there were open, sincere disciples. So He meekly taught these shallow theologians and furnished His students another model of excellence under fire. But Jesus did not answer their immediate question as formulated. Looking beyond that, He perceived a deeper condition of heart, an unrecognized, underlying need that could not be met simply by stopping with the answer to their specific test question. Their fundamental problem did not consist in learning whose wife the lady would be. It was rather their thinking it strange that God should raise the dead (cf. Acts 26:8).

He did not answer their question exactly as formulated, further, because had He done so, they would not have been one step closer to faith in the resurrection than they were before. Although their attack was open, without the flattering preliminaries others had used (22:16), the Sadducees' dishonesty and cunning really attempts to discredit Him. They came not to learn the truth by seeking honestly to remove what seemed to them an insurmountable objection to faith. In fact, when Jesus later arose from the dead, forever and personally proving the falsity of their reasoning, they not only did not repent, but proceeded to murder the fearless, unimpeachable witnesses to that fact, while totally discounting the evidence of the empty tomb (Acts 4:1f., 5f.; 5:17-40; 7:1, 54—8:1; 9:1f.)!

Their theological rationalism was not a matter of indifference that could safely be ignored. Their rejection of penalties and rewards in an afterlife and their disbelief in the continuance of the spirit after death (cf. *Wars*, II,8,14) WIPED OUT GOD'S JUDGMENT ON MEN'S SINS AND OFFERED NO REAL INCENTIVE TO BE RIGHTEOUS BY GOD'S STANDARDS. These materialists' anti-resurrection stance is deeply serious, because no one can form a proper judgment about his relationships and responsibilities in this life, unless he takes into serious account the life to come. It makes a big difference whether we think the grave ends it all or not. Belief in a fuller life after death cannot fail to influence character in every way, every decision, every thought. (Study Matt. 10:26-33.) This antsupernaturalism was no

unimportant heresy for it is a belief that weakens man's fear of God and His judgment, destroys his character, undermines his sense of honor and truth and freezes his warmth and humanity. If the grave ends all, people no longer really matter and can be manipulated to achieve one's own ends.

Jesus well knew His opponents also denied the doctrine of an all-ruling Providence. Josephus (*Wars*, II,8,14) reports that the Sadducees "suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil" in contrast to the Pharisees who "ascribe all to fate and to God, and yet allow that to act what is right, or the contrary, is principally in the power of men, although fate does cooperate in every action." The Sadducean view of God's disinterest in human behavior would definitely affect their view of God's power to transform human nature's body after death.

Is it any wonder, then, that Jesus countered instantly with *Ye do err!* Those who feel that Jesus' answer only offers quiet, patient instruction to sincere, but ignorant, men, must remember Jesus' understanding of their malignant purpose. Even if His total answer seems less severe, nothing can soften His blunt judgment: "YOU ARE WRONG . . . QUITE WRONG!" (Mark 12:27; Matt. 22:29). How could Sadducean priests, charged with the high duty of knowing and teaching God's Word in Israel, be anything but shaken and deeply humiliated by this charge of fundamental ignorance of GOD?

He incriminates them on two counts: *Ye do err . . .*

1. *Not knowing the Scriptures* which you pride yourselves on knowing so well! The Sadducees whose severest, unrelenting critics were the sharp-eyed, hard-nosed Pharisees, HAD to be ready to debate a Scriptural point at any moment. So how could it be truly asserted that they did not know them?
  - a. They did not know their true meaning, because they wrongly interpreted them.
  - b. They did not accept the Scriptures which they could correctly decipher, because they did not welcome them as the royal decree of an Almighty God who could command and expect their loyal submission.
  - c. In opposition to the plain meaning of Scripture, they set up their own mistaken philosophy, refusing to believe anything they held to be irrational, intangible or unempirical.

The Sadducees' position was that no text of Scripture demanded belief in life after death. Beyond the text cited by Jesus, the Sadducees showed ignorance of texts like Genesis 21:12; 22:1-18 (= Heb. 11:19, 35); Job 19:25f.; Ps. 16:9-11 (= Acts 2:27-31); 17:15; 23:4, 6; 49:13-15; 73:23-28; Eccl. 12:5-14; Isa. 26:19; 53:10-12; Dan. 12:2, 3; II Sam. 12:20-23. True, scholars differ on whether they considered all the Old Testament to be God's Word or only the Pentateuch. So, if these Jewish liberals did not consider the historical and poetic writings of authority equal to that of Moses' Law, then they would not have been persuaded by citations from these texts.

In fact, they show amazing ignorance of the translation of Enoch (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5), because Moses' record of this mystifying experience raises the possibility of a deathless life with God in another realm. They also ignored Elijah's marvelous rapture (II Kings 2:11). Was this not true history? And what of the other actual cases of literal resurrection from the dead (I Kings 17:22; II Kings 4:35; 13:21)? Was this fiction or unbelievable legend? What of the unyielding hope for the future life affirmed of other Old Testament heroes? (Cf. Heb. 11:13-16, 35.) Were these all misguided dupes? Perhaps the Sadducean rebuttal would argue that the former were but cases of resuscitation, in that the resurrected died again later, whereas real resurrection at the Last Day must be to immortality and incorruption. It could be argued, further, that because Enoch and Elijah did not die, they constitute no evidence for resurrection from the dead.

2. *Not knowing the power of God.* But in what sense were they expected to know it? Could they have known what Jesus reveals here? How does a correct estimate of *the power of God* resolve the question about the resurrection life? God's unlimited ability to create a universe in which neither death nor marriage are necessary components is ignored by men whose entire worldview is too small and whose appreciation of God reduces His true power's potential to the creation of what is. They have no sanctified imagination to believe He could create a world somehow different from the present age. This severely limits their concept of God's power. They ignore His power to conquer and eliminate death from human existence. Even if no Bible text ever implied it, they should have seen that an adequate concept of God's power to effect it could also foresee it.

Even if Sadducean proponents rejected great texts like Isaiah 25:6-8; 26:18f.; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Hosea 6:1f. and others, arguing that physical resurrection to permanent life is not unequivocally taught in them; on the other hand, these texts should have led them to recognize that the same mighty, creative, life-giving power of God who had been able to redeem Israel from Egyptian slavery and Babylonian exile, should be more than ample to bring about the total, physical resurrection of His people. If God is truly Giver of life, breath and all things, can He be thought to be unable to grant His children to share in His own life eternal through resurrection.

But the Sadducees had such a low view of God, because their denial of life after death was consistent with and bolstered by their rejection of the existence of angels and spirits (Acts 23:8). In fact, if spirits do not exist, how could there be a God who is Spirit (John 4:24; they must have dismissed Isa. 57:15; Zech. 12:1)? And could not such a Spirit really reveal Himself by supernatural messengers such as angels? Rationalists all, these shallow, dogmatic men simply took for granted that what to them was inconceivable or incomprehensible must also be dismissed as incredible. Nevertheless, **THEIR ABILITY TO CONCEIVE IT DOES NOT DIMINISH GOD'S POWER TO EFFECT IT!** Their view is typical of modern rationalists who would deny the resurrection's truth because they cannot conceive how it could occur: "To presuppose a resurrection is to involve incredible or impossible conditions." The plain answer of Jesus meets all these objections: "God's power is sufficient!" The Jewish materialists had surrendered the clearly Bible doctrine of the omnipotence of God for whom nothing is impossible! Could they have so easily forgotten Deuteronomy 3:24; I Chronicles 29:11f.; II Chronicles 20:6; Psalm 66:7; Jeremiah 32:17? These had not the faith of Abraham! (Cf. Rom. 4:18-22.) Cannot the Creator of Adam, who originally gathered the scattered, unliving dust and made man live, regather all the particles of all the dead and raise them to eternal life? What kind of a god do these unbelieving priests have anyway?!

Jesus' debating tactic involved two steps: He first refuted the Sadducees' objection by showing the fallacy upon which it was founded, i.e. their underestimating God's power to transform everything in the new world (22:30). He then furnished positive proof of the resurrection

by citing Scripture (22:31f.). In so doing, He showed how their citation does not prove what they supposed it did, and demonstrated that Moses' doctrine, given elsewhere, completely and truly disproved their notion. They had constructed an invalid argument, because it was established on false assumptions foreign to Moses.

1. The Sadducees' presupposition that gave meaning to their question is this: If there is a world beyond this life, it must necessarily resume or extend common characteristics, categories and elements typical of the good life here, including this life's relationships, especially marriage. As with other uniformitarians who assert that the past is the measure of the present, these argued that the past and the present is the measure also of the future for all time and eternity.
2. They further assumed that our present, natural body, with all its present, fleshly, earth-life needs and appetites, must be identical to that glorious, future, spiritual body with which we will be raised. (Study 2 Baruch 49-51; contrast I Cor. 15:35-38.) They undoubtedly eliminated some of the negative features, but the basic assumption remained.

Worse yet, apparently the Pharisees too shared this view, even perpetuating it. This would explain why they had been so spectacularly unsuccessful in refuting the Sadducees. Only someone who knows infallibly that marriage is not to be continued in the future world could definitively confute it. And yet their presupposition is clearly not taught by Moses, but merely added to their understanding of the Bible, as if it too were undoubted truth. The absurdity lay, therefore, not in what the Bible actually affirmed, but in this false assumption. No Bible text ever asserted that ALL relations and categories of this present age must extend over into the future world. Jews of Jesus' day argued that full recognition of the resurrected dead depended on their being in every respect like themselves in this life, including every physical trait and every social relation they bore before death. "The same old warts and the same old wife for ever and ever!" (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, II,399 However, 2 Baruch 49-51 sees a transformation to glory after the resurrection.)

#### MORMONS TOO ARE IGNORANT OF GOD'S POWER

The basic presupposition behind the Mormon "temple marriages for time and eternity" is essentially the same as that of

the Sadducees. They too see eternal life as continuing the marriage relation contracted in this life, and the multiplication of the human race exalted by the special LDS formulas. Hence their invention of "temple marriages" wherein earthly relationships are solemnized for eternity either with the same earthly marriage partner or with a number of others with whom earthly marriages was not possible because of civil legislation against polygamy. (Cf. *Doctrine and Covenants*, § 132. See also *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 455ff.; 475, on the temple ceremonies involved.) This simply discounts God's ability to create an entirely new and better reality where marriage and present earthly family has no significance.

To the Mormons and the Sadducees and anyone else like them, Jesus answered as follows:

**22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven.** These materialists had imagined a situation that cannot exist, so their illustration collapsed because inapplicable. Their use of Scripture was mistaken on the ground that they had quoted a text that addressed a problem limited to this life, but were attempting to use it to establish conclusions concerning life after death in which marriage and reproduction have no meaning. Their proof-text did not even contemplate, much less deny, the possibility of a future change in human mortality effected by a resurrection to eternal life and immortality. So, quite different rules would govern that entirely new, transformed life, not the old regulations concerning succession and inheritance intended to regulate affairs in this mortal, corruptible existence. In fact, as Luke put Jesus' words: "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage" (Luke 20:34ff.). Evidently God instituted marriage for the multiplication and consequent preservation of a human race cursed by death. Rather than create a fully populated earth, He created only two human beings. Sexual multiplication by the marriage of these two and by that of their children was His design for populating it (Gen. 1:28, cf. 9:1, 7). Foreseeing that man would sin and bring death upon himself, God was thus providing for the preservation of the race beyond the death of its individuals. Thus, children are born of marriage to outlive their parents and so continue humankind, providing a plan for succession through inheritance, as contemplated by the Mosaic text cited by the Sadducees. So far, this is our state of being.

But what does that affirm about a DEATHLESS society already fully developed numerically to the full extent God desires. In fact, the redeemed who rise again, never to die again, are already a fully developed society where the need for numerical growth and primitive replenishing would not necessarily exist. Hence, there would be no need for that earthly institution that guaranteed these two results. This is why Jesus reveals that marriage is a foundational institution of this world, but not of the eternal world.

Although Jesus did not touch other questions specifically, like: "In the next world do we expect to hunger and thirst?" (cf. John 6:35, 39, 51-58, 63-68f.), His reply provides a clue to other things that puzzle us about eternity, such as our fleshly kinships. If some of our loved ones die without Christ, would not our joy in God's presence be marred? To deal with this, Jesus refers us to two glorious realities (Luke 20:34-36):

1. The power of God to create a world of reality so new and different from this earth's present reality and relationships (marriage, birth or other) is such that we can scarcely conceive of it any more than we can imagine a world where marriage is not necessary because death will be no more. And yet it is His projected plan. He can also make us forget earthly ties in the blinding glory of greater ones. Earthly families are not eternal; only their individuals.
2. The other reality is God's great family: "They cannot die anymore because they . . . are sons of God" (Luke 20:36). This new family must so overpower our present vision that we do all in our power to bring our loved ones into it by faith. But we may rejoice in that vision, knowing that God's will shall have reunited into His house all those who love Him. Who would WANT to spend eternity with those who know not God nor love our Lord Jesus Christ?! Whatever else it means to be "sons of God," this glorious relationship shall so supersede and so transform all other kinships as to remove all sorrow or sense of loss when our ungodly, earthly kin shall not have been saved. HOWEVER, in no way must this comfort compromise our concern for their salvation any more than it compromise the stability of our earthly marriages. The present rightness and permanence of our earthly

marriages must be as real as our deep concern for the salvation of our loved ones. But once this earth's testing is over and death has come, resurrection (and all that it entails) is next! The revelation of the sons of God at last and the chance to be at home with our Father forever will more than compensate any sense of loss of the temporary things of the past earth-life.

**They . . . are as angels in heaven.** Two preliminary observations must be made:

1. He does not say, "They are in heaven, as the angels," nor "as angels: in heaven." This would have required a different construction in Greek. (Alford suggests: *en tô ouranô eisin, hōs àngeloi.*) Punctuated differently, Matthew's text could be ambiguous (*all'hōs àngeloi, en tô ouranô eisin*: note the comma: "but as angels, in heaven they are."). Luke, however, removes the ambiguity by reducing the longer expression to one word, *isàngeloi*, "equal to angels," thus eliminating "in heaven." So, being *in heaven* is not the major consideration, but similarity to angels. Rather, *in heaven* describes the angels, not the place where the saints dwell. But so saying, Jesus points to an entirely different manner of life in that reality which even now exists *in heaven*, just as real as, if not more so than, that which materialists insist is the only true one here on earth.
2. In the face of Sadducean disbelief Jesus dares affirm the true existence of *the angels in heaven*. He knew He stood on unassailable ground because this truth can be sustained even on Sadducean principles. Angels appear constantly in writings of unquestionably Mosaic authorship. (Gen. 16:7-11; 18:1-19:1, 15; 21:17; 22:11, 15; 24:7, 40; 28:12; 31:11; 32:1; 48:15f.; Exod. 3:2; 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2; Num. 20:16; 22:22ff.) *Angels* appeared at great signal events in Hebrew history which reflected the very reason for the nation's existence, its call from God, its blessing and protection during its wilderness pilgrimage. Could they doubt this?

But what is Jesus' basic thrust in saying *they . . . are as angels in heaven*? This state of being is, according to Jesus, the antithesis of marriage. But this question is complicated by the fact that, while Matthew and Mark contrast earthly marriage and our future likeness to angels, Luke contrasts our equality with angels and earthly mortality: "they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are

sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:36). Both are unquestionably true, but is there something to learn here about angels and our future nature as well as about our selves even now? If so, what? Jesus affirms that . . .

1. We will be marriageless. The future life is not just a repetition of this age. He urges us to rethink, because there CAN be something richer and fuller, more deeply satisfying to the soul than even marriage and family as we now know it. Marriage is an institution of this cursed earth populated with mortals. But where a redeemed society is already numerically complete and lives deathlessly with God, the primitive needs of a mortal race would also become obsolete along with their solution, marriage. Marriage's joy of close, intimate and lasting fellowship will not be replaced by solitude. Rather, it will be replaced by fellowship far closer, more intimate and longer lasting than anything we can now imagine. The Lord's point is that we will have no more need to reproduce our kind in the future world, than the angels to reproduce theirs. Succession is not needed where death is no more.

Some Jews believed that 200 angels, by marriages with human women, brought on the flood. (Cf. Enoch 6:1ff.; 12:4ff.; 15:3-7; 19:1f.; 2 Baruch 56:12; Jubilees 5:1, traditions attempting to interpret Genesis 6:1-4.) However, Jesus' affirmation that angels do not marry corrects this mistaken concept, and leaves viable the interpretation that sees "the sons of God" as descendants of Seth and "the daughters of men" as Cainites, in any case fully human. (For other arguments against that theory, see Keil & Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, I, 127ff.)

2. We will be deathless. This eliminates the need to perpetuate the race through marriage and procreation, since the resurrected saints cannot die anymore (Luke 20:36). Angels furnish, therefore, an appropriate model by which to understand human nature after the resurrection, i.e. after death's effects shall have been removed. Jesus refers not to the absence of passions or sensitivity to earth's pleasures, but to angels' immortality to illustrate our own after the resurrection.
3. We will be sons of God (Luke 20:36). Even this trait explains man's deathlessness:
  - a. As creatures of God, angels too are called "sons of God" (Job 1:6; 38:7; Ps. 89:6f.). The redeemed too are properly called

- “sons of God” being created, like the angels, to share in the glorious happiness of the direct presence of their common Creator. So, created deathless to live in God’s presence, redeemed mankind also will rise immortal, dependent on God, enjoying the fellowship of His presence. (Cf. 1 Enoch 69:4f., 11.) So, redeemed man will be restored to his original immortality, lofty glory and divine fellowship in God’s family which he enjoyed before the fall into sin in Eden. But his new creation will occur at the resurrection: “they are . . . sons of God, being sons of the resurrection,” (Luke 20:36), i.e. produced by the resurrection, finding their new life or origin in it.
- b. Further, they are “sons of God,” because, having risen, they share the immortal divine nature, made like the Lord Himself (I John 3:1-3; II Peter 1:3, 4; Phil. 3:20f.; Rom. 8:28ff.). They will have been made partakers of the divine nature more fully than ever before in this life, because they will then be finally and fully in possession of the full privileges of their adoption, their inheritance and their final liberation from all of sin’s effects on their spirit (Rom. 8:21ff.).
  - c. People take part in this age by natural birth. In that age, by resurrection. In this world babies are born as “sons of men.” In that world each will receive his new spiritual body directly from God Himself by the stupendous transformation that will occur at the resurrection. All, like the angels, will be considered “sons of God,” a fact already reflected in the new birth (James 1:18; John 1:12f.; I John 3:1ff.).

#### MORMONS ARE IGNORANT ALSO OF SCRIPTURE

*They . . . are as angels in heaven* (Matthew and Mark) and “they are equal to angels and are sons of God” (Luke) are Scriptural affirmations contradicted by Mormons’ affirmation that Mormons who are eternally married by the proper solemnities in their temples are SUPERIOR to angels and gods (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 136:16ff.) whereas those married only for this life are “appointed [to be?] angels.” The eternally married Mormons become “gods, because they have no end” (*ibid.*, v. 20). In saying “They neither marry nor are given in marriage. . . . They cannot die anymore,” Jesus contradicts Mormon theology, because He implies that deathlessness eliminates the need for marriage since immortals have no need to multiply themselves in marriage.

But Mormons teach that polygamous Mormon priests eternally married "in the eternal worlds" are to "bear the souls of men" (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 132:63; cf. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, VI,275; VIII,208).

From the standpoint of these materialists, Jesus' revelation of the power of God does not answer the Sadducees' doubt. True, it conclusively replied to their false presupposition by furnishing a reasonable alternative to their grossly materialistic view of the question. Now, however, He must answer their doubt by furnishing positive proof that they would be compelled to admit: the authoritative Word of God through Moses! Not satisfied to win a debate against His enemies, He remembers that error entangles their mind. So He seeks to free them by teaching what they had not yet learned. Now He must say, "Your ignorance of God's Scripture blinds you to that text of all texts that reveals that God is still worshipped by living men."

**22:31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead**, i.e. "that the dead do rise" (Mark and Luke), is to be proved by their own Bible of which they were sadly ignorant. Jesus knew His Bible and understood its implications better than they did. He depends not only upon His own authoritative revelation or personal understanding of the after-life, but leads them to the already well-attested revelation of God in the Old Testament, the source whence any ordinary Jew could have argued the greatness of God and His power to eliminate death and bless man with an eternal life different from this one in all significant respects.

**Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God?** This one question alone hammers home three massive truths useful in our defense of the faith:

1. Jesus emphatically vindicated the Mosaic authorship of Exodus 3:6 furnishing solid proof that rings like iron: "Moses showed" (Luke 20:37) "in the book of Moses" (Mark 12:26). Clearly, the Sadducees themselves accepted this fact. Otherwise, they could have objected that no doctrine was to be accepted as final or authoritative except what was of undoubted Mosaic authorship. The Sadducees rejected the Pharisees' position that the oral law was also binding. Both, however, agreed that Moses' Law was the definitive voice of God. So Jesus quoted Moses, and by so doing, confirmed his authorship in the presence of Jewish authorities dedicated to destroy Him, should anything He said prove vulnerable.

22:31

Obviously, then, for the rulers of Judaism, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, especially Exodus, was a long-settled issue.

2. Moses' writing was the Word of God: *that which was spoken unto you by God* (Matt. 22:31). As such, it commands attention and obedience by all men under its authority. What the Old Testament Scripture says is the voice of God speaking to us. Man does not need a mystical illumination or special inspiration to receive God's message. Jesus proves conclusively here that empathetic study of the written text of the Bible will communicate God's message to the reader as truly as if God Himself were addressing directly from heaven. That such truth was first revealed to an ancient people living thousands of years ago, does not lessen any of its force for us. In fact, Jesus expected the Sadducees to have learned from what God said to Moses! For Him, the Old Testament was no dead letter, but the living voice of God.
3. The Sadducees had cited Moses as their supreme authority (22:24). So, rather than quote the Psalms, Isaiah or Daniel, Jesus goes all the way back to Moses, the source of the supposed refutation of the resurrection. From this two more points are gained for our instruction:
  - a. He began on common ground with His opponents: their shared belief in the Pentateuch. He proceeded to demonstrate that His own position was both implicit in and demonstrated by what they accepted, but that their position was disproved by that same source.
  - b. Contrary to modern critics who see Israel's concept of resurrection or of life after death as gradually learned from Egypt, Mesopotamia or Greece, Jesus leaves no room for a late discovery of the resurrection idea. Rather, He traces its origin to GOD and in *that which was spoken unto you by God!* In so doing, our Lord exploded the hypothesis of the evolutionary development of this concept, citing one of the earliest writings of the Old Testament. While Israel's understanding of it certainly developed over the centuries, the objective concept itself had already been revealed by God.

So, by tracing the resurrection's truth to God, Jesus appealed to every wavering bit of faith in God that each Sadducee present could muster to be persuaded by the truth.

How could it be truly affirmed that God addressed the Sadducees of Jesus' day, when Exodus 3:6, 16 is God's conversation with Moses?

God's statement to Moses contained a true principle that held implications not merely for Moses and his age, but for every age. It was a truth about God and man just as true in Jesus' day as when God first said it to Moses, and especially in this case, will be true and significant until the judgment.

CAUTION should be used, however, in seeking to apply to Christians the message of the Old Testament. Christians are not subject to the old covenant made with Israel, hence may not properly claim every promise or consider themselves obligated to obey every statute of the Old Covenant Scriptures. What was required of old Israel is NOT NECESSARILY required of the new "Israel of God," the Church. (Cf. Rom. 6:14, a summary of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews, the major epistles that discuss and clarify this important hermeneutical distinction.) But with this caution clearly in view, we must scan the Old Testament as well as the New Testament for truth that God intends men of every age to learn, regardless of the particular covenant under which they serve Him.

**22:32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob** (Exod. 3:6, 16). Our Lord could not have selected a more familiar text. There was no phrase dearer to the heart of all Judaism, no language more expressive of the old covenant. This is no "text taken out of context for a pretext," but one of the highest revelations of God! According to Jesus, this most famous title for God, this name that expresses His covenant with Israel through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, fairly SINGS the necessary truth of the resurrection.

And yet, there is no reason to doubt that Jesus would have laid before these enemies the most convincing passage possible. Surprisingly, however, His choice falls upon a passage that merely implies life after death from which the resurrection could only be inferred. In fact, without penetrating beneath this text's surface, the whole point that Jesus sees there would be missed entirely. Most readers who pass over this Bible statement would conclude that the only message conveyed there is the fact that the God who appeared to Moses is to be identified with the God who was worshipped by the patriarchs. This much it does say. But Jesus sees something else in this text as yet unrecognized by all its usual interpreters in Israel.

According to the Son of God, to say *I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob* must lead irresistably to the conclusion that *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*. How did Jesus arrive at this conclusion? What does He mean?

1. Is Jesus arguing, as would any rabbi, that the verb in Exodus 3:6 must be interpreted in the present tense? No, because Mark and Luke both reflect the Hebrew original by omitting this verb. It is highly unlikely that any argument can be established on a verb that can be omitted. The point then, is the title "God of Abraham," not so much the verb "I am." It is pointless, therefore, to argue that God would have had to say, "I *used* to be the God of your forefathers back when they were alive." It is not a question of tense but of title. To base the true conclusion on the present tense is coming at the question the wrong way.
2. The main question is: what does it mean to be *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*?
  - a. Consider Who said this: *God*. Jesus is arguing on the basis of the very nature of God. But "God is Spirit" (John 4:24), the central figure of the very spiritual world these materialists deny. But if you Sadducees dare admit this one Spirit, your wholly materialistic world-view is already compromised, because where there is one undeniable spirit, there can be more than just one, in fact, a whole spiritual universe inhabited by spirits of just men made perfect (Heb. 12:23).
  - b. This God is Abraham's *God*. This is not the same as "Creator" or "Owner." Although these words correctly describe what may once have been true, they are nonetheless irrelevant to prove the present existence of the creature after death. On the other hand, if in some true sense God is still the covenant-keeping *God of Abraham*, then Abraham is still worshipping Him, still experiencing a covenantal communion with God in a way that is intimate and abiding, hence a LIVING being. If, on Sadducean principles, the patriarchs died and were consequently annihilated, this would mean the termination of God's association with them as their *God*. In fact, the relationship of worshipper to worshipped is one that is chosen by the worshipper. But, if God can describe Himself meaningfully as *the God of Abraham*, then, Abraham must be alive in the time of Moses, long after the patriarch had been gone from his body for centuries.

- c. To ask what it means to say *the God of Abraham* in its highest, truest, richest significance is to recall what God had been to Abraham. If He had been Abraham's highest shield and greatest reward for a life of faithful obedience (cf. Gen. 15:1), what special happiness, dignity or distinctions marked the lives of these patriarchs, that would justify such high promises God Almighty made to them? Were these limited only to this life, and not rather something projected beyond it? (Contrast Gen. 47:9; see also Heb. 11:13ff.) If God had provided them nothing more than the usual miseries attendant upon this life, He should have been ashamed to be called their *God*. But He was not ashamed (Heb. 11:16). Rather, His faithfulness and lovingkindness demand that He actually do for them the very thing that fully justifies His highest promises to them. But without another life after death, how could He fulfill the true purpose and full measure of His obligations sworn to them? But, if God really blessed Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in harmony with the highest intent of His word to them, there must be a state of rewards, and its corollary, a state of punishments. Since it is incredible that all of God's rewards or punishments are meted out upon their recipients in this life, it would logically follow that there must be another life after this one. In short, *The God of Abraham* needs more time, time beyond this life, to fulfill all His good promises to Abraham, to the full extent of their intended meaning.
- d. Jesus' argument implies that, if the patriarchs are forever to remain lifeless handfuls of crumbling dust in the Macpelah cave, then the Sadducean uniformitarian argument must conclude that ALL qualities of this earth must continue forever, even death itself. But is annihilation greater than GOD?! Must the Almighty continue to surrender to extinction hence lose, His godly children who trust him? Will death never be conquered? Is *the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*, that name upon which Israel's covenant with God hinged by virtue of their physical connection with these very patriarchs, at last discovered to be meaningless phrase? No, cries Jesus, this glorious title of *God* means something! *God is not the (losing) God of the dead, but the (victorious) God of the living!* Is it thinkable that the great God Almighty should deign to entitle Himself: "The God of molding bones, dust and ashes"?! Worse, for the Sadducees,

the dead no longer existed. Accordingly, from their point of view, to say, "I am the God of the long-dead patriarchs," is equivalent to: "I am the God of non-existent things, the God of nothing"—an obvious absurdity. (The Lord is using *dead* in the sense intended by the Sadducees.) But put this way, not even these liberals themselves would accept the logical conclusion of their argument and must agree with Jesus that God is the continuing object of worship of really existing people, even if these have already passed through death's door into the realm of the spirit.

In fact, if God meant no more than "I am the God of dead, senseless ashes," when calling Moses to the herculean enterprise of Israel's liberation from Egyptian bondage, how could such an ill-chosen reference have inspired Moses to rise to the challenge with the necessary trust and courage? For, if death ends all, to what purpose had the patriarchs themselves trusted God? Indeed, the hope of life after death is guaranteed not merely for the ancient fathers with whom God's covenant had originally been sealed, but really extended to all the people who respected that covenant. The proclamation at the head of the Ten Commandments reads: "I am the Lord YOUR GOD" (Exod. 20:2). Is He to be Israel's God for only so long as each Israelite shall live, and not, rather, forever? Only this latter, high view does justice to God and gives sense to the Old Testament which, without victory over death, would be like so many other ancient texts: just the dusty chronicle of the past struggles, victories and defeats of an ancient people and their god, but not the history of genuine redemption from all the losses of Eden, including death!

- e. To be *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob* is not something that can be affirmed of now-extinct historical figures, except by historical allusion or wistful memory. How could these names in any meaningful sense refer to dead, senseless ashes? These are the names of people who are alive somewhere. And by repeating each single name, linking each man to God, Jesus is not reverting to a mere "archaic form of speech." Rather, He intends to underline the personal relationship enjoyed by God with each individual patriarch.

But how does Jesus' citation of Moses prove something about resurrection? Since the quotation does not mention it directly, and

since He argues by inference, is He not arguing, rather, for an intermediate state of existence between death and resurrection, rather than for resurrection directly, as He claimed in 22:31? To answer this question correctly, it must be understood by approaching it from the Sadducees' standpoint.

1. The Sadducees taught "that souls die with the bodies" (Josephus, *Ant.* XVIII,1,4). With this Jehovah's Witnesses agree (*Harp of God*, 41-48; *Let God Be True*, 66-75). A Sadducee could have written, "Death is the loss of life, the end of existence, the complete cessation of conscious physical or intellectual activity . . ." although a Jehovah's Witness authored this definition (*Make Sure of All Things*, 86). The fundamental confusion shared by the ancient Sadducees and their modern counterpart is their confusion of "soul" with "spirit," so that all that may be affirmed of the one must also be true in all respects of the other. It is not impossible that Sadducean thought, like that of the Watchtower, was influenced by texts that affirm the similarity of human souls with those of animals (Ps. 49:12; Eccl. 3:18f.), by texts that affirm the mortality of souls (Ezek. 18:4; Josh. 10:28-39 ASV; Ps. 22:20, 29; 89:48 ASV; Isa. 53:10-12) or by texts that speak of the unconsciousness of the dead (Ps. 13:3; 146:4 ASV; Eccl. 8:5f., 10). Bible statements that rightly describe a mortal living on earth they mistook for information that must only be understood of the state of the spirit of man after this life. Hence, they discounted texts that teach that every person shall really survive death. True, death dissolves that unique combination of body and spirit called "soul" in most texts. In this sense, of course, the "soul" dies, the body "sleeps in the dust." But THE SPIRIT neither dies nor sleeps, but, rather, returns to its Maker and is alive unto God and returns with Him at the resurrection (Eccl. 12:7; Luke 20:38; I Thess. 4:14). The popular confusion of "soul" and "spirit" for "all that there is to man" makes the interpretation of many texts difficult. This is not so much because the texts are unclear, but because the interpreter unconsciously brings his own understanding of "soul" or "spirit" to the text, then tries to fit it into his preconceived scheme of reality.
2. Further, it is also apparent from Jesus' mode of reasoning that the Sadducees shared the general Hebrew idea that God's love and concern for man involves His interest in the whole man, body and soul. Rather than consider the body the prison of the soul, as

did Romans and Greeks, the Hebrews were taught to conceive of the human spirit as originally formed to express itself through a body.

While it may be argued that nothing can be concluded about the resurrection body by comparing it with our first creation (Adam's body), it should be noted that there is no Scriptural evidence that there has been or will be a change in our spirit's mode of expressing itself, i.e. in some form of expression other than in a body. Rather, our long-awaited perfection through transformation at the resurrection will complete our redemption by furnishing us a glorious, immortal BODY (Rom. 8:23; I Cor. 15:44, 49, 53; Phil. 3:21). So this divine choice evidences His desire that our spirits continue to express themselves by means of a new body like that of Jesus.

I Thessalonians 5:23 turns out not to be a new revelation so much as the confirmation of this ancient view. (Cf. also *psuchè* in Acts 2:27, an Old Testament concept where "soul" = "the entire person" is the parallel.)

The Sadducees apparently turned this concept against resurrection by questioning "the immortal duration of the soul" (cf. *Wars*, II,8,14), since, if the body apart from the spirit is dead, the spirit apart from the body must be dead too! The one has no independent existence without the other. There could be no life after death, except that life realized in some kind of a body, since there could be no life but that in a body. Implicit in their argument, then, is the practical equation of resurrection and life after death. Thus, to prove the truth of the one is to establish the other also.

To refute their position, all Jesus had to demonstrate was that spirits have an existence separate from the body. This He did by proving from Scripture that the great patriarchs of the Hebrew faith are still alive centuries after leaving their bodies, that they returned to their Maker and God, hence are not totally extinct at all. Death did not extinguish their spirits. They were even then living in the sphere of God. (Cf. the New Testament doctrine; II Cor. 4:16—5:9; Rev. 6:9; Matt. 17:3; I Thess. 4:13-18, esp. v. 14.) Jesus did not affirm the resurrection of these Old Testament worthies; only their survival after the death of their bodies. But given the Sadducees' (Hebrew) view of man's wholeness of soul and body, the soul and body, the resurrection of the body was no longer impossible, but must necessarily follow.

### III. THE RESULT: JESUS' MASTERFUL REBUTTAL INSPIRES PRAISE (22:33)

22:33 **And when the multitudes heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.** Not only were the crowds deeply impressed by the penetrating insight of Jesus' wisdom and instruction, but even some of the theologians in that group had to admit, "Teacher, you have spoken well" (Luke 20:39). Rather than beat Him, the Sadducees' attempt had only succeeded in establishing Him more securely in the crowds' admiration. Should not the crowd be astonished that only this young preacher could with such marvelous ease unravel the ancient problem with so indisputable a text?

Undoubtedly some Pharisees too had seen the crowd and joined in to listen. They had been crushed endlessly by their personal failure to answer that old Sadducean trick question many times before. Could they do anything but rejoice to have this thorn in their side removed by the sound defence of the resurrection now completed by Jesus? Even in this moment charged with tense emotion, it must have required no little courage so quickly and so publicly to announce their concurrence with Jesus' deeply satisfying spiritual victory over the unbelief which their own best answers could not eradicate. He had used their own familiar weapons with a mastery they could not equal! One of these Pharisees could hardly wait to inform his cohorts of the Sadducean debacle (cf. 22:34).

#### THE EFFECTS OF JESUS' DOCTRINE

1. THE DOCTRINE OF MATERIALISM IS PROVEN FALSE. Jesus' principles establish the reality of the human spirit, because it survives the death of the material body. Therefore, man is more than matter. At death his spirit survives alive in the spiritual realm of the living God and must answer to Him!
2. THE PROPHETIC DIGNITY OF JESUS RECEIVES FURTHER CONFIRMATION. How could Jesus answer with such certainty that marriage does not exist in the spirit world? While some might suppose this statement to result from His careful meditation, He simply stated the truth the way He who came from heaven knew it to be.
3. THE RESURRECTION WILL NOT MERELY RESUME THIS LIFE, BUT INTRODUCE A NEW LIFE FAR BETTER. There will be no

death in the new family of God. The frontiers of this new life are limited only by the unlimited creative power of God who makes it possible.

4. **THE AUTHORITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES IS FURTHER VINDICATED.** What a tremendous impact the Old Testament had on Israel, particularly that section of the Scriptures the scholars of today question as non-Mosaic! Is it not instructive that these rankst unbelievers in Israel (the Sadducees) wholeheartedly embraced precisely this part of the Scriptures, and that our Lord, while informing their ignorance, founded His argument exclusively on it? Can theologians escape the Lord's condemnation, if they deny what Jesus affirms concerning the validity of the Old Testament's witness as specifically from Moses?
5. **THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S POWER TO PERFORM ALL HE PROMISED AND MORE (Rom. 4:21; Heb. 11:19).** All is well with those who trust God. Death holds no terrors for His people.
6. **GOD'S JUDGMENT IS A DECIDED CERTAINTY!** Hitting hard at Sadducean denial of God's judgment (cf. *Wars*, II,8,14), Jesus proved that God's menace to destroy the wicked and unbelieving in eternal punishment is no idle threat. If no one had survived physical death, it might have been assumed that death were but a freak accident of human evolution, not a divine judgment. It might have been assumed, further, that the ancient story of God's punishment of Adam and his descendants with bodily death were but an ancient legend attempting to explain a natural phenomenon. But, because Jesus conclusively proved that men really do survive death to live in another world, He proved thereby that the ancient record was no myth. Rather death meted out to Adam and his children is really a divine judgment. So, if men really survive their personal punishment for Adam's sin (= death), they must answer for their own personal conduct before God in that immortal world. So, by punishing men with death for Adam's transgression, God gave assurance of His future justice to be faced by a race entirely resurrected. Death is God's assurance to all that He means business. Resurrection is His assurance that divine justice has not been totally satisfied by the physical death of each individual child of Adam. Rather, judgment must yet be faced, because there is life after death!
8. **THE COMMUNION OF THE SAINTS IS REAL.** If Abraham, Isaac and Jacob live, what of the rest of the Old and New Testament

saints, yes, and all those who have died since? Duckworth (*P.H.C.*, XXIII,445) reminds us of . . .

. . . the indestructible bond that knits in holy communion and fellowship the whole redeemed family of God. We talk and act as though we on this side of the veil constituted the whole Catholic Church; we forget that the majority is elsewhere, that we are but a fraction of it: we forget the great cloud of witnesses gathered during the ages growing day by day, the unseen multitude which no man can number; we think but seldom of that paradise of God, that land of the living, where loyal hearts and true stand ever in the light. Ah brethren, it is we who are in the shadows and the darkness, not they. . . .

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Who were the Sadducees? What did they believe? Describe their position in the religio-political spectrum in Israel. What else does the New Testament say about them? In what major points did they differ from the Pharisees?
2. What was the law they cited? What practical problem in Israel was this law intended to solve? Why underline the childlessness of each marriage?
3. Show how the Sadducees' practical case seemed to them to enjoy Mosaic sanction for their position regarding the resurrection.
4. What is the importance of Jesus' remark about their ignorance? Show how this is no mere jab to hurt them but an integral part of His answer.
5. Show in what way the Sadducees were signally ignorant of the power of God.
6. Why is Jesus' allusion to angels particularly significant in this conversation with Sadducees?
7. In what way are resurrected humans like angels in heaven? What additional light does Luke throw on this question?
8. In what way does marriage have only to do with this life?
9. In what way were the Sadducees tragically ignorant of the Scriptures, according to Jesus?
10. What Bible text did He cite in proof of the resurrection? What other Old Testament texts COULD He have cited with equal force?
11. Show how the text cited actually proves the truth of the resurrection. Show how the same text could be used to deal with other Sadducean disbelief.

12. Why did Jesus choose to cite a text out of the Pentateuch for the Sadducees?
13. Show how Jesus defended the divine and human authorship of the text cited. (Cf. Mark and Luke.)
14. What was the crowds' reaction to Jesus' answer?
15. According to Luke, what was the reaction of the theologians present?

### C. THE QUESTION OF THE GREAT COMMANDMENT IN THE LAW

(Parallel: Mark 12:28-34; cf. Luke 10:25-28 not parallel)

TEXT: 22:34-40

34 But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, gathered themselves together. 35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, trying him: 36 Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? 37 And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second like *unto it* is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. 40 On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Where do you think the Pharisees had been before this (cf. 22:15, 22)?
- b. What do you think is the motive behind this lawyer's desire to "try Jesus"? If he really had the proper understanding of God's revelations as Mark shows him to have, from what point of view would he have formed this question so as to "try Him"?
- c. In your opinion why did he choose precisely this question from among the many he could have brought before Jesus? Was this a question commonly discussed among the Jews? What, if anything, does this choice of questions reveal about the lawyer himself?
- d. What could the Pharisean party hope to gain by submitting specifically this question?
- e. In what sense is love for God rightly the first and greatest commandment?

- f. In what sense is love for one's neighbor rightly the second commandment? Why should it be second? In what sense does it depend upon the first commandment?
- g. In what sense is it true that "all the law and the prophets depend upon these two commandments"? If they are themselves part of the Mosaic Law, in what sense can the Law itself *depend* upon them? Even if everyone in our texts call these "commandments," are they really legal requirements? How would you describe them, if you think they are not legal requirements?
- h. In what sense should we understand the various terms listed with which we should love God: "heart," "soul," "mind" and "strength" (added from Mark)? Do you think these refer to different parts of man's makeup? If so, how would you define each one?
- i. If Jesus did not furnish the scribe unique or original information in answer to his question, but rather cited him some texts out of his own Bible,
- (1) what should we conclude about the texts cited and about the Bible that included them?
  - (2) what should we conclude about Jesus? Is He a true prophet or not? Are not prophets supposed to reveal fresh, new material? How do we know Jesus is God's true Prophet precisely because He cited that ancient material?
  - (3) what may we learn about the psychological advantage to be gained by an appropriate use of appeals to sources held to be authoritative by people whom we seek to persuade? Did the Apostles ever cite pagan sources for the same purpose?
- j. How would you describe the character of the lawyer as this character appears in the man's final answer to Jesus given by Mark?
- k. According to Mark, the scribe's reaction was: "You are right, Teacher, you have truly said that . . ." Do you think he was standing up for Jesus in the midst of the fiery opposition the Lord had encountered in the previous skirmishes? Since he was a Pharisee (Matthew), what does this tell you about (1) this man, and (2) about Pharisees in general?
- l. Mark reports Jesus' reaction to the lawyer's approval: "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." To what phase or expression of the Kingdom does Jesus refer?
- m. If Jesus' answer could have been known through appropriate study of the Old Testament, why is it that, according to Mark and Luke, "after that no one dared to ask Him any question"?

- n. What steps should one take to apply Jesus' teaching given in this section to his own life? What questions should we ask about every issue or problem we face in order correctly to practice what Jesus requires here?
- o. Do I really love God with the reality and fervency Jesus is talking about?
- p. Do I really care about my neighbor the way I care about my own needs, problems, interests and desires?
- q. According to Jesus, all of God's religion is based on these two commands. Go through the New Testament listing all its commands and prohibitions. Do you find any that cannot be subsumed under one or the other of these two heads?
- r. What do you think would happen if everyone were to practice these two commandments as Jesus means them?
- s. What would the pragmatic success of practicing these two rules prove about the validity of the Christian faith?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had reduced the Sadducees to silence, they got together. One of them, an expert in Mosaic Law, who had been listening to the debate between Jesus and the Sadducees, approached Him. Recognizing how well He had answered His opponents, this Mosaic jurist proposed the following question to put Jesus to the test: "Teacher, what sort of command qualifies as the most important in the Law?"

Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Listen, Israel: the Lord our God is the only God there is! So, you must love Him with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole mind and with all the strength you have!'" This is the great, foremost precept. There is a second one similar to it and here it is: 'You must love your neighbor as you do yourself.' The commandment does not exist that is more important than these two. In fact, these two commandments are the ultimate principles behind the entire Law and everything the prophets taught, their very essence."

"Exactly, Teacher!" the theologian said to Him. "You are so right to say that the Lord is the only God there is. Furthermore, to love Him with all one's heart, all one's understanding and all one's strength, and to love one's neighbor as one loves himself, this is of far greater importance than the whole sacrificial system."

Recognizing the intellectual freedom with which the man answered, Jesus said to him, "You are not far from God's Kingdom."

After this, no one risked asking Him any more questions.

## SUMMARY

One Pharisean legal expert, impressed by Jesus' debating skill, tested Him with a question concerning the most important commandment in all Mosaic legislation. Jesus pointed to those commands which required whole-souled concern for God and one's neighbor. These, according to Jesus, summarize the Old Testament's message. To this the theologian could but echo his assent that this morality really surpassed mere ritual without it. Jesus openly praised this Pharisee's discernment. However, no one else signed up for the debate: they did not dare!

## NOTES

### I. SITUATION

22:34 **But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, gathered themselves together.** Unexpectedly, someone broke away from the circle around Jesus to carry the exciting news that the Nazarene had just now muzzled their old foes, the Sadducees. So Sadducean wit too had dried up: their thrashing attempt to expose the Galilean rabbi as an unprincipled incompetent had back-fired too! The Pharisees convened all their forces at the same place (*sunéchthēsan epì tō epì autō*) to discuss the next step. But, if but recently they had been blistered by Jesus' intelligent answers, why should they desire to get burnt again?

1. Jesus' victory over the rationalistic Sadducees on the great question of the resurrection brought mixed reactions: let's try to imagine their frame of mind in this situation.
  - a. The Pharisees were in an expansive mood because someone had finally answered the skepticism and doubts that had so long frustrated their own efforts to settle the crucial doctrine of the resurrection.
  - b. But their rejoicing soured because it was not a Pharisee that had soundly disposed of the Sadducees. Rather it had been that upstart rabbi from Galilee! So they could not rejoice even if He had confirmed this truth so dear to their party.

- c. Rather than assemble to communicate to Him their party's gratitude for devastating that skeptical position so effectively, they regroup to attack Him! They do not care about the victory of truth, because they cannot rejoice that Jesus had overcome. In their malicious envy and party spirit they seek to crush Him who had caused truth to triumph. (Contrast Paul's attitude: Phil. 1:15-18.)
2. The Sadducees had proved their incompetence as guardians of the nation. But their liberalism could not be expected to hold the line against someone who genuinely respected the Scriptures but rejected traditional orthodoxy. Surely a shrewd Pharisean mind could be trusted to state truth correctly where the best of Sadducean scholarship wilted before the Galilean prophet.
  3. But if Jesus could be tempted to commit Himself on another question that would also embarrass the Sadducean hierarchy sufficiently to goad them into disposing of Jesus, the Pharisees' hands would be clean, the Sadducees would do the dirty work, and Jesus would be gone. If He damned ceremonial law and Levitical ritual with the same vehemence He attacked rabbinical decisions (Matt. 15:1ff.), the embittered Sadducean hierarchy would have ample cause to indict Him, because their political power depended upon the prestige and importance of the Temple and their monopoly of its liturgy.

Perhaps one or all of these considerations prodded the Traditionalists to renew their earlier, ill-starred assault. This time duplicity must be excluded: He could unmask it too quickly! (Cf. 22:18; Luke 20:20, 23.) Now Jesus must be examined with sincerity and fairness to determine the breadth and depth of His real mastery of God's revelation and human nature.

**22:35 One of them, a lawyer:** The Pharisee chosen to represent these highly agitated, frustrated heads of orthodox religion was an expert in theological law (*nomikòs*, Mark calls him a "scribe" *grammateùs*), hopefully well-qualified to present the test question and judge the correctness of its answer.

#### WHAT IS WRONG WITH MATTHEW'S ACCOUNT?

Some commentators, seeing that Matthew omitted to present this lawyer in a favorable light by not mentioning his positive reaction to Jesus' answer and the Lord's commendation of the man, consider Mark's version "preferable" because it presents

the good side of the world of the Pharisees. (Cf. Bruce, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, I,276). Again,

The accounts vary in regard to the motive of the questioner. In Matthew he comes to tempt, in Mark in hope of getting confirmation in a new way of thinking on the subject, similar to that of the man in quest of eternal life—that which put the ethical above the ritual. No anxious attempt should be made to remove the discrepancy (*ibid.*, 424).

To describe Mark's as the "strictly accurate account" (so Alford, 401) is to disparage Matthew's less detailed report and declass it for weak believers as "less strictly accurate." These scholars fail to observe that it is Mark who is less circumstantial in creating the setting, because, without Matthew's information, we would surmise that the scribe simply wandered up and, hearing how well Jesus handled His antagonists, asked a question of his own. Further, it is Mark who omits the true relation of this scribe to his party's intention to "try" Jesus. Thank God, we can have BOTH Matthew and Mark to get the larger picture! Even so, we need not suppose that both Gospels record all that happened that day.

A cursory reading of Matthew alone would lead to the conclusion that the lawyer was an enemy like the party he represented. **HOWEVER MATTHEW DID NOT AFFIRM THE LAWYER'S PERSONAL HOSTILITY.** This is merely a surmise based on his being a Pharisee (a group of bad repute elsewhere in Matthew). But with Mark's information, we can arrive at what even Matthew knew but did not state: the scribe was actually personally open to Jesus. So, Matthew's information is correct so far as it goes and does not contradict Mark when interpreted in light of ALL the available facts. By what right does the modern scholar demand that Matthew register all he knew about this or any other event? But that Matthew correctly represents this event as a "trial" is evident from the consideration of what Mark's scribe's reaction would have been, had Jesus NOT answered his question as well as He did! Those commentators that downgrade Matthew are simply unwilling to let all the witnesses testify to what happened that day. Is this true objectivity?

Do the following points include all the facts to form a good hypothesis?

1. Jesus beat the Sadducees fairly in debate and at least one Pharisee heard Him and reported His victory to his party (cf. Luke 20:39).
2. The Pharisees gathered to discuss this event but could not decide the best course of action.
3. Another Pharisee, a lawyer, who too had heard Jesus, because he had a personal desire to talk to Him, volunteered to propound the test question. Because of his intellectual stature, he is chosen to represent the party in this next attack.
4. The lawyer then honestly presented Jesus his test question to which he had given much personal thought and really sought confirmation of his own conclusions. This explains his sincere admiration of Jesus' ability.
5. Jesus, accordingly, dealt with the man as an individual, ignoring his party interests and connections. This explains His commendation.
6. In the process Jesus really and definitively passed the Pharisees' examination.

In the lawyer's question, therefore, there could well have been the confluence of two separate sets of motives: his own, apparently good (as pictured by Mark) and those of his party, apparently bad (as Matthew depicts them). Trying him (*peirázōn autōn*), then is Matthew's wise selection of a word whose meaning-potential covers both motivations: "to try, make trial of, put to the test, to discover what kind of a person someone is, either in a good sense; to put men to the test so that they may prove themselves true [or in this case, competent, HEF], or in a bad sense, to bring out something to be used against the one who is being 'tried,' or to entice to sin." (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 646.)

1. *Trying him*, on the part of the Pharisees, must be interpreted as their endeavor to expose and destroy Him. From their party's standpoint the question was but an intellectual exercise, not a spiritual quest for truth.
2. *Trying him*, for the lawyer, meant something else. He was one of the crowd who saw Jesus best His adversaries (Mark 12:28). Notice this incidental result of Jesus' debating tactics: not only were His answers good, but His spirit inspired confidence and invited further investigation of the truth He taught. With no sinister motive, the scribe is *trying him* with a seriously intended question

to see if He, who could so brilliantly muzzle the willfully treacherous, would be just as prepared with an appropriate response for an honest, sincere questioner. *Trying Him*, his intention is to use this vexed question to test the depth of this rabbi's understanding, if we may discern this intention from his reaction to Jesus' answer and the Lord's commendation (Mark 12:32ff.).

**22:36 Teacher.** His opening words do not drip with honeyed sarcasm (cf. 22:16). This address is spoken in the quiet reserve of a dignified scholar intent on getting to the bottom of this entire question once and for all. In fact, if his goal is to sound Jesus' depth, he could not have selected a more appropriate question! The choice of questions reveals his own breadth and depth. He does not choose some obscure, trifling issue, but goes to the heart of true religion: *What is the great commandment in the law?*

To appreciate this theologian's question, we must understand something of the current debate in Judaism out of which it comes, as well as the practical problem behind the debate: are all of God's commands equally important?

1. The scribes were agreed that the Law contained "heavy" and "light" precepts. (Cf. Pal. Talmud, Ber. 1:4; Yeb. 1:6.) But they differed on which commandments belonged to each category. Some considered circumcision as conferring the most merit; others held for tithing, fasting, sacrifices, washings or phylacteries as pre-eminent. Edersheim (*Life*, II,404 cites Ab. 2:1; 4:2; Sanh. 11:3; Deb. 4:6) doubts that these rabbinic distinctions between light and heavy commands were in the lawyer's mind, since rabbinism had decreed them of equal merit and equal validity.
2. But is this question appropriate? Is not anything God commands of importance equal to anything else He commands, just because HE says it?
  - a. Jesus did not reject the lawyer's question as inappropriate. He answered it as it stood. To ask for the most important command of God does not necessarily imply that the questioned intends to dismiss those of lesser importance. Such a question may only intend to establish right priorities, especially in the presence of a conflict of duty where, of course, the more important duty must have priority.
  - b. Even Jesus speaks of "the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matt. 23:23) in contrast to the law of tithing. (See Matt. 5:19 notes.) Our Lord is in perfect

harmony with many marvelous Old Testament texts that summarize basic religion. Check them out for your own enrichment: Deut. 10:12-22; I Sam. 15:22f.; Ps. 15; 40:6-8; 50:7-23; 51:16-19; 69:30f.; Isa. 1:11-17; 33:14-16; Jer. 7:21-23; Hos. 4:1; 6:6; Amos 5:14f., 21-24; Mic. 6:6-8; Hab. 2:4.

3. But this debate over most important commandments is productive of two widely differing points of view:
  - a. One position seeks to find the one law which may be kept in place of observing the whole law. This is a bare minimum approach that seeks one supreme command that excludes the others. This view misses the fundamental principle that the intentional omission, or ignoring of even one commandment is tantamount to violation of the entire law (James 2:10), whereas the purpose of God's whole system was to create a spirit of willing submission to God its giver and of readiness to do the whole thing.
  - b. The other seeks to find the one law that gives sense, direction, purpose and strength for keeping the whole system. This view seeks to understand the heart of the question in order to obey the whole law cheerfully, completely and intelligently. This seeks the one law which is great because it includes the others. This is probably the lawyer's intent.

The lawyer's question would be better translated: "What kind of command is great in the law?" (*poia entolè megalè en tō nòmō*). Plummer (*Matthew*, 308) expands this question thus:

What sort of characteristics must a commandment have in order to be accounted great? Or is there any commandment which has these characteristics in a very marked degree? . . . What principle ought to guide one in making such distinctions?

He wisely seeks that fundamental principle necessary to measure the greatness of any commandment. He is not distinguishing moral and ceremonial laws as such, nor "light" from "heavy" precepts. He asks the right question: which of the 613 laws stands at the heart and foundation of God's will?

How could the lawyer's Pharisean brethren have permitted such a question? What could they have hoped to have gained by his proposing specifically this test? If this represents the peak of their ingenuity in this crisis, how did they suppose it could have helped their cause?

1. It was a real, debated issue. It could be asked sincerely as for information, hopefully without raising the suspicion of its intended

Victim. Let Him expose himself on this hotly contested issue where they felt they had room to argue. "With 613 commandments to choose from, in a battlefield already scarred with positions, previously taken and abandoned, regardless of what he picks, we can always argue the relative importance of others in that bewilderingly wide field of laws both religious and civil, moral and ritual, home and foreign, public and private! At any rate, we can discredit his wisdom."

2. By focusing the issue on the Law, perhaps Jesus might be drawn into some misguided or otherwise objectionable declaration of His own authority in contradiction to the Law. Perhaps He would even abolish certain parts of the legislation in favor of others, inciting the Pharisees to scream for the high holiness and validity of the whole Law.
3. They could sound the depth of His knowledge and grasp of the Law. Anyone well-versed in legal questions could easily expose another who had not done his homework. So, it was a Pharisean expert in theological law who was chosen to launch this test-question.

In this setting it becomes clearer why this question would satisfy both the evil-intentioned legalists and their more fair-minded spokesman: it tested Jesus' rabbinical credentials to the core. He had pushed them into an uncomfortable but just compromise regarding Roman legislation (22:17), but this time He must answer concerning the holy law of God! How little these Pharisees understood the truly *great commandment in the law* is measured by their hatred of this Nazarene, their Neighbor, and consequently, by their rejection of the God whose message Jesus bore. However, God makes even men's malice to praise Him, for although it was Pharisean envy that posed Him this question, we too needed to know what principles lie at the heart of fundamental religion. So, what was intended as a dangerous trap for Jesus, God made to be a good thing for us: now we have His answer! Further, when asked about a point of law, Jesus turned everyone's attention upon GOD, the Author of the Law, and upon OTHERS for whose benefit the Law was made.

## II. JESUS' RESPONSE

### A. The First Table of Law: Duty to God (Deut. 6:4, 5)

22:37 **And he said unto him.** Although Mark (12:29f.) accurately remembers that Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4, 5, thus prefacing the

first great commandment with that solemn declaration of the unity of God, Matthew focuses on the second verse which presupposes it and proceeds at once to the only answer universally recognizable for the Pharisee's question.

### 1. What we must do: Love

*You shall love (agapéseis: future used as an imperative).* This is an order! (Cf. note on *agapào* on Matt. 5:44, Vol. I, 312ff.) The kind of love commanded here is that intelligent good-will toward God that always seeks to do what He considers to be in His best interest, to please Him. This is, however, more than a sentiment however deeply felt. It is a motive to action, fundamental to everything God's people are to do. Israel was taught to love God. (Study Deut. 10:12f.; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3f.; 30:6, 16, 20.) He orders this love, because, where love is the governing attitude of the individual, the readiness to do anything He requires will be there too. Where this high motive is missing, a person will not do what is right. If he tries to do the right without this love, he will do it for the wrong motives, and it will not be accepted by God. Or if he attempts to do the right without love, his initial enthusiasm will have no staying power and he will not do what is right for very long. Israel's historic failures illustrate the failure to love God.

To *love God* means to long for His fellowship, to delight in Him, to appreciate *all* His attributes, His justice, love, patience, mercy, power and plans, to show zeal for His honor. It is an unlimited, constant readiness to obey anything He says and to imitate His character. To *love God* completely means to love what He loves, to love what is His, especially to love the man God made in His own image (cf. I John 4:20). To *love God* truly means to fear Him above all else, trust Him no matter what, esteem Him for all that He does, adore Him and depend upon Him.

### 2. Whom we are to love: God

*The Lord your God* is not an Infinite Number or a mere Supreme Being, but *the Lord*, or the great *Jahvè*, the self-existent, unchanging, eternal One whose very names assure us of His reality in contrast to all other objective non-existent deities men may choose. He is ever able to affirm: "I am He who IS!" (Ex. 3:14f. LXX: *egò eimi ho*

ὁν . . . *Kùrios ho theòs*; Hebrew: *ehyeh asher ehyeh* . . . *yehovah elohey*.) No one needs ever to fear that this Lord will go out of business! Although *kùrios* ("Lord") is but a Septuagint substitution for the Divine Name (JHVH), Jesus did not retranslate the text as He quoted it (much to the chagrin of Jehovah's Witnesses who would wish He had inserted the Divine Name in Hebrew). This leaves God's Lordship ever as one of the nuances involved in His Name. So He is *the Lord* whose sovereignty rightfully commands your love. He is *your God*, the object of your worship, service and praise, your Creator, Owner and Ruler whose covenant relation to you guarantees His faithful mercies and nearness to you. By signing His full Name to this command, God gently reminds His people who it is that earned the right to demand this unselfish, limitless love.

### 3. How we are to love Him: Whole-heartedly

What does it mean to *love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, with all your mind*? Are these phases of our being to be thought of as distinct areas?

1. *Heart* (*kardìa* = Heb. *leb*). The Biblical concept of *heart* concerns the basis and center of our personality. (Cf. Ps. 104:15; Acts 14:17; I Sam. 16:7; I Peter 3:4; 1:22; Eph. 4:18; Matt. 13:15; I Cor. 4:5; 7:37; Heb. 8:10; I John 3:20f.; Rom. 1:24; Eph. 6:22; Matt. 11:29.) These texts use the word *heart* to refer to what we really are spiritually, sometimes even physically. It is the center of our thoughts, feelings, conscience, will and disposition. If deep-rooted sentiment is meant here, we must love God supremely, ardently, with all we have and are.
2. *Soul* (*psuchè* = Heb. *nephesh*). Usually, but not always, *soul* in Scripture refers to that combination of spirit and body that we call "life." (Cf. Matt. 20:28; John 10:11, 15, 17.) But because we see life wholistically, we speak of our soul in the way we speak of our whole being. (Cf. John 12:27; Acts 2:43; 14:22; 4:32; John 10:24 in Greek; Matt. 10:28, 39; 16:25f.) *Soul*, then, emphasizes our readiness to surrender our life to Him, living it out in devoted service and being ready to die for Him, if faithfulness to Him requires it.
3. *Mind* (*dianoia*). No Hebrew equivalent here, because Jesus added this concept. Loving God with our intellect or reason, or our understanding involves various things:

- a. Deep sincere beliefs held about God, not blind, unthinking devotion nor unreasoning, mystic contemplation. Our faith must be intelligent, based on evidence reasonably evaluated.
  - b. Dedicating all our intellectual abilities and efforts to Him. In God's Kingdom there are no prizes for intellectual shoddiness or lack of preparation. We are to use our critical faculties to study to learn everything we can about God and His will. This dedication of mind to God's service is the only justifiable reason for Christian scholarship. But where pride in one's own intellectual accomplishments becomes supreme, one no longer uses his mind to love God.
  - c. Intelligent understanding of all we do, whether in worship or service, not mindless "religious" motion. A mind disconnected whether in prayer or praise supposedly prompted by the Spirit, is condemned by this great commandment to love God with the mind. (Cf. I Cor. 14:14-19 in the context of I Cor. 13.)
4. *Strength* (*ischus* = Heb. *me'od*, Mark 12:29). This refers to both our physical strength and the spiritual vitality of our inner man, in short, to all the energy of our being, our force of character, the command we have over our circumstances and environment, our will and purpose.

None of these concepts are very far apart. In fact, it may be that there is deliberate overlapping in the meaning of the four words used, so that, by piling up these inextricably linked spheres of human personality, God could lead us to grasp the totality of our commitment to Him. (Note the cumulative force in the threefold repetition of the phrase "with all your. . .") This leaves no room for divided loyalties or partial affections. This entire, intricate inter-relation of our emotions, understanding, reasoning and will must participate together in our service to God. (Cf. Ps. 103:1.)

Lenski (*Matthew*, 880) is right to recognize this commandment, coming as it does from God Himself, as speaking to the subject of human psychology: If our Creator, who unquestionably understands us better than we could ever know ourselves, used every term He knew we would grasp to indicate our complex, spiritual and physical nature, one must pronounce false and misleading all simplistic theories of man that see him as a mere animal, a mere machine or a mere anything. What a high view of man God holds! We are not computer cards deterministically

programmed nor mere numbers, but MEN “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14).

This commandment is God’s demand that we give Him everything we have and are—the whole thing!

22:38 **This is the great and first commandment**, because it underlies the first table of the Decalogue, forbidding all sins against God, such as polytheism, atheism and idolatry. Because it underlies God’s unity and absolute uniqueness, it also bans syncretism which reduces the unique, living God to a local deity of Jews and Christians, but not of the whole world. It further damns every type of philosophic concept that functions as a god in the mind of its adherents. It is also *first*, even indirectly suggested in the Second Commandment: “showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments” (Exod. 20:6; Deut. 5:10). It is unquestionably *first and great*, because out of it will flow everything else, even the second great commandment.

In the final analysis, however, we cannot serve God directly. He has no necessities we could supply. We could never increase His glory nor confer on Him something He had not already given us. But He does have needy human beings here on earth to whom we may offer useful service in His name. So He recommends these in His place:

### B. The Second Table of Law: Duty to One’s Neighbor (Lev. 19:18)

22:39 **And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.** (See notes on 5:43-48; 7:12 and 19:16-20.) The legal expert had requested that Jesus select that single law which was greatest. The Lord, however, must indicate also a *second* which is a necessary companion to the first.

1. It is a *second like unto* the first in that loving one’s neighbor refers to the same category of moral law. He selects no third commandment. Only these two, taken together, form the ethical foundation for all the rest. It is this shared function that exhibits their similarity.
2. Both command *love* that motivates one to do what the law directs (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8ff.)
3. This precept follows naturally as the corollary to the first, because love for one’s fellows is the only concrete way any of us can demonstrate the reality and depth of his love for God in whose image all men are created (Matt. 25:31-46; I John 3:10, 17f.; 4:20; Heb. 6:10; Prov. 19:17).

In fact, our love for God must be the precondition and inspiration for love for our fellows. It is only when we love God's view of man that we can learn to love man too. Only when we see in man what God sees in him can we begin to love him. Thus, the definitive foundation of true humanity (humanness and humaneness) is our appreciation of God. Remove this, and our idealism degenerates into cynicism because man's resistance to change will frustrate us. Human ingratitude will make us pessimistic about man's perfectibility and quench the enthusiasm of our ideals. So, the true foundation of a broad, unrelenting, indomitable love for man must be deeply rooted in the staying power we derive from a loving God who renews our vision of what man can become and furnishes us the power of His Spirit through the Gospel to effect this.

### 1. What we are to do: Love

*You shall love (agapéseis*, future used as an imperative, the same form used to order us to love God). This love can be ordered. It is no sweet sentiment touching only the affections or simply a question of tastes or inclinations, likes or dislikes. Rather, it is an intelligent concern for our fellows that puts us at the service of their true welfare to seek their highest good. Sin is impossible for the person who loves another the way God means it, because love prompts him to want to bless, not injure, the other (Rom. 13:8-10). Stealing, killing, committing adultery and exploiting others become unthinkable. Such love prompts us, not simply to "feel right" about our neighbor, but to do right with him and for him, according to God's ethical standard. This love causes us to teach him, correct, reprove and exhort him. Not to do so becomes, by definition, evidence of lack of love.

### 2. Whom we are to love: Our neighbor

That this love for one's neighbor must include more than one's own fellow citizens, his private family circle or coreligionists, is amply proven by the chapter from which this text is taken, Leviticus 19, esp. 19:34. (Cf. Deut. 10:18f.: God loves the aliens, so you love them too!) Jesus chose a Samaritan to display the meaning potential of the word, *neighbor* (Luke 10:25-37). Study also Jesus' rejection of "love limited to local associations" (Matt. 5:43-48). Such love requires us to act benevolently toward our enemies even to the point of helping them in their distress, by acting neighborly toward them (Rom. 12:14-21).

### 3. How we are to love Him: As we love ourselves

*As thyself:* Jesus assumes that normal people rightly love themselves. So, He appropriates this psychological reality to serve as the standard for determining the depth and warmth of our love for others.

1. There is a proper self-love that is at the same time Scripturally correct and psychologically sound. (Study Eph. 5:28f., 33.) He did not say, "Love your neighbor *instead of yourself*," but "Love him *as you do yourself*." What is this appropriate self-love? It is that genuine appreciation of our own dignity and worth as human beings, based on what the Bible considers man to be.

The opposite of this kind of self-love is self-hate, a despising of what one is or has. This self-depreciation leaves a person insecure about his worth and struggling for some other identity he hopes will make him confident and someone he himself can look up to. It is this self-hate that arrogantly exalts self at the expense of others and tramples on them to get ahead.

But if a person could just accept himself, he would have inside information on how to accept others. In fact, the degree to which we genuinely accept ourselves—our abilities, our limitations, our economic situation, our parents, our age, health and sex—in short, our true identity—is the measure of our ability to love and accept others. But it is also useless to tell a sinner to accept and love himself when he hates himself. His bad conscience relentlessly pursues and accuses him.

2. Therefore, this proper kind of self-acceptance must be acquired. Unrepentant sinners cannot really love themselves, unless they can arrive at a satisfactory solution of the very problems that make them hate their own self-image. Only God has that kind of a solution: He loves them. When sinners find out that the God who made them also loved them enough to send Jesus to die for them, and believe it, then this realization that they are loved gives them a dignity, a sense of worth and a concern for their own self-preservation. And the sinner will not rest satisfied to remain as he is, because he has hated what he is and was. Rather, he can let Jesus make him over in His own likeness, and in this new self he can rejoice (Rom. 6:1-11; II Cor. 3:18; 5:17-21; Eph. 4:22-24; Phil. 3:20f.; Col. 3:10-17). So, this proper love for ourselves must originate in

in our embracing God's love for us: "If He loves me despite all He knows about me, surely I can accept myself. Thus it becomes much easier to love my neighbor."

The new creature in Christ can now view his gifts and limitations, his wealth or poverty, his slavery or freedom, his nationality, sex, age or health, with unaccustomed equanimity (I Cor. 7:17-24; Gal. 3:28). Whereas before he was an outsider, now he belongs (I Peter 2:9f.), now he is important (I Cor. 12:12-27), now he is secure (John 10:28f.). This kind of person knows and accepts his own worth and does not have to prove himself by trampling the rights of others. Rather, his new-found self-respect gives him insight into what it means to have appropriate respect for others. But God taught him to love himself, live with himself and gave him courage to face himself in the mirror. Sensing what this means to himself, he can now appreciate what it means to bring others to this same joy. He can now love others as himself.

3. This self-love does not contradict other divine demands that we deny ourselves, crucify our pride or otherwise mortify what is earthly in us. (Cf. Matt. 16:24; Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:5.) In fact, the very inducement to sacrifice ourselves in order to be all that God desires so we can bask in the glory of His blessing, is the fact that **WE WANT IT FOR OURSELVES**. (Paradoxically, self-denial is robbed of its priceless, sacrificial character, if the self we sacrifice was not loved anyway. Therefore, even self-denial presupposes self-acceptance without pride, self-love without smugness.) And because His blessing is offered to those who look not only to their own interests, but also to the interests of others, in humility considering others better than themselves, doing nothing from selfishness or conceit (cf. Phil. 2:3f.), He is really rewarding the unselfish, the uncalculating, the generous. His rewards are nothing that would even interest self-seeking, pushy people. Rather, the rewards of self-denial and self-sacrifice are so deeply satisfying, so highly desirable and so perennially refreshing, that the person who really loves himself will seek these above all else. This is the only individual who, in his own best interest, really loves and serves others (II Cor. 12:15; I John 3:16). For Jesus there is no *necessary* conflict between serving one's own interests and that of others: one can have both (Phil. 2:4).

**22:40** On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets. *Law and prophets* is a circumlocution for "the entire Old

Testament" (cf. notes on 5:17f.; 7:12), i.e. whatever God revealed of His will, whether by law or prophet, is suspended from these two nails. Take away this love for God and man, and *the law and prophets* fall to the ground, meaningless. In so saying, Jesus underscores these truths:

1. No mere formalism or external ritual has any value apart from the spirit in which it is done, or divorced from the great, underlying principle which it is intended to exalt and exemplify. The Law has not obeyed nor the prophets respected, unless obedience be prompted by whole-hearted love. Jesus condemns the heresy of elevating ceremonies over morality and principles.
2. Everything God commands is important, however seemingly external or ceremonial, because even the apparently insignificant duties are not properly done without reference to the high purpose of God for requiring them. What God has revealed is not a series of unconnected commandments, but one united, all-embracing design for a life-style that has a solid basis in love for God and man.
3. These two commandments hang together in combination. Contrary to moderns who would put the accent on the second commandment and glorify humanistic philanthropy or some other religionless love for one's fellows, while at the same time forgetting love for God and His will, Jesus associates these two concepts and actually gives priority to the first! Human life is shallow and incomplete without both. Neither mere social action nor passive piety can be enough. Brotherly love and philanthropy cannot be substituted for true religion, but should be produced by it.
4. However, it is simply not true that if a man truly loves God with all his being and his fellowman as himself, he will not need any further commandments. Jesus implies that *the law and the prophets* are those revelations God considered NECESSARY TO RENDER EXPLICIT WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE TO LOVE PROPERLY. Otherwise, why did not God simply dictate these two ordinances from Sinai and skip the rest? To paraphrase McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 604), Love without guidance is insufficient: the whole law and the prophets were given to furnish this leadership for love to follow. "Love without law is power without direction, and law without love is machinery without a motor." (Study I Cor. 9:21; John 14:15, 21; James 1:25; 2:8, 12.)

So, even though these commandments are written into the Law as individual precepts in it and are explained by the prophets, nevertheless

these two regulations are the basic theory behind the entire Mosaic system. They are the moral principles which, in the given moment of Hebrew history called for the Pentateuchal legislation and comments thereon by the prophets. Although an integral part of that now antiquated Law, they rise above it and are permanent, because eternally right. They are the goal to which the Law was conducting people (cf. I Tim. 1:5). This explains why the Gospel era will glorify and expand them.

Nor is it true that Jesus replaced *the law and the prophets* with love. Rather, He fulfilled them by love. *The law and the prophets* dictated the right actions, but love furnished the right motive for doing them. Now, under Jesus' program, we are not required to observe the externals of Mosaic Law, not even the Ten Commandments as such. But we are required to observe the principles and spirit that inspired the Old Testament system: love for God and neighbor. These unchanging rules had as their purpose that we learn to glorify God and do good to our fellows. Jesus has altered the details considerably, but He holds us responsible for faithful obedience to these same ethical principles that were the foundation of *the law and the prophets*. To put it another way, we are essentially under the same system of religion and ethics known to the Jews. The great differences—and they are tremendous—are a question of specifics, not principles.

These are the two principles which will give us light and direction not merely in all our life here on earth, but will also prove to be excellent guidance forever! Can we ever outgrow our need to love God or the saints? This is the permanent element in religion and morals. Baptism, the Lord's supper, even evangelism will all pass away at the Lord's return. But not these two commandments. With them we are onto something eternal!

These two rules are the key to understanding not only all God was saying in *the law and the prophets*, but also everything He has now said in the Gospel too. Any New Testament precept that seems dark or difficult will find its explanation and motivation in one of these two master-principles of true religion and morality. Our concept of duty to the Lord must not consist in blind obedience to a series of segmented, isolated rules. Everything we do for Him must find its ultimate origin in, or be reducible to, one or the other of these two rules.

## WAS THERE NOTHING UNIQUE ABOUT THIS ANSWER?

Scholars are fond of pointing out that this was not the first time a Jew ever selected these two commandments for candidacy for expressing the Law's essence. (Cf. Luke 10:27 which is a separate event.) Nor would it necessarily have been original with that other lawyer who recited them together for Jesus then.

The conjunction of these two commandments in one unitary concept has been noticed in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, ed. Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 326,328,334): Dan. 5:3: "Love the Lord through all your life, and one another with a true heart." Issachar 5:2: "But love the Lord and your neighbor, have compassion on the poor and weak." Issachar 7:6: "I loved the Lord; likewise also every man with all my heart." Another version of this text: "The Lord I loved with all my strength; likewise also every man I loved more than my own children." (Cf. Zebulon 5:1.) However, the Jewish author of that book, as also Philo (*De Septen* quoted by Plummer, *Matthew*, 309) was just as dependent upon Moses and the Pentateuch as was Jesus who was quoting Deuteronomy and Leviticus. So they were not really unique wisdom either. **HOWEVER, THESE JEWISH WRITINGS DO NOT EXPLICITLY AFFIRM THAT THESE TWO COMMANDS TAKEN TOGETHER ARE THE LAW'S GREATEST.**

But must we suppose that Jesus always tried for originality in His teaching and answers? Why SHOULD He attempt to be original, when asked to cite the Mosaic Law's greatest commandment? He had been asked to comment on the Torah, drawing forth its essential element expressed in a single commandment. This He did. His originality does not depend on this. There are times when one must NOT be an "innovative theologian," as some moderns love to be considered. This was a time when Jesus must be the faithful ambassador of the One who sent Him, loyally delivering the message intrusted to Him. If Moses had already revealed these commandments, we should not expect Jesus to hope for absolute originality in this case.

But was there nothing original in His answer?

1. Could it be that the uniqueness of Jesus' answer lies in His refusal to annihilate human personality? Many religionists have promoted

self-hatred as their only solution, demanding various forms of self-punishment and endless penance. Jesus, on the other hand, launches His ethic from a solid base of each individual's self-respect defined by God's estimate of man's true worth. However, Moses had said it first.

2. Would it be that the unique feature of this answer lies in the perception that true religion and ethics do not arise out of mere conformity to some external code? The man who is righteous merely because he fears not to be, is not really good by Jesus' definition. But so say also the Old Testament prophets.
3. Could it be that Jesus alone expressly underscored the profound connection and similarity between these two commandments, summing up in these two alone the entire meaning of religion and ethics, and by so doing, placed them over against every other rule or precept? Who else did this?

### WHAT DOES THIS INCIDENT REVEAL ABOUT JESUS?

1. He knew His Bible well and trusted its teaching. The Pharisean test intended to probe His grasp of Mosaic Law. But He reached confidently into that vast library of legal prescriptions and quickly returned with the two concepts that furnish the basis of everything else.
2. Jesus was not prejudiced against the Pharisees per se, as a cursory reading of chapter 23 would perhaps lead one to think. When even a Pharisee asked a worthwhile question, regardless of his party's motives, Jesus could answer him civilly and helpfully and commend his insight and encourage his progress toward the Kingdom.
3. Jesus' perfect balance is also obvious: rather than reject ritual in favor of moral law, He pointed to those principles that made both necessary and gave sense to both. He saw no false dichotomy between the moral and ceremonial laws, because both grew out of the same principles.

Let it not be thought that, because Jesus reduces all of religion and morality to these two simple rules, this simplicity means that our practice of His teaching is going to be easy. Nothing could be more difficult than responding consistently to the far-reaching demands these principles make upon our entire being. To surrender unconditionally to God the sovereignty of our will, to accord Him unlimited

command over our mind, and to fix our attention and affection solely on Him is to accept a life-long, life-changing mission. And to accept our neighbor as Jesus loved him, sympathetically prepared to lift and bear his load, to place ourselves in his place so completely as to consider his success our own responsibility, thus renouncing our own rights so we can promote his well-being, is not going to be easy. Anyone who thinks Jesus has somehow made things easy has simply not begun to ponder His meaning nor practice His answer!

### MUTUAL ADMIRATION RESULTED

Characteristically, Matthew did not record the lawyer's response. Sometimes after penning Jesus' final punchline, the Apostle simply drops any further narration, to let the reader meditate on Jesus' words, be challenged or corrected by them, rather than distract him with further details about what others did. (Cf. 8:4, 12f., 22; 12:8, 50; 15:20; 16:4, 12, 28; 17:21, 27, etc.) To Matthew it seems to matter, not so much how others reacted, as how his readers would. Mark, however, documented the lawyer's admiring rejoinder and Jesus' commendation of his grasp. (See the PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY for details.)

How considerably this lawyer differs from the scribe in Luke 10! The other, upon facing this same self-evidently true answer, wanted to justify himself and, not unlikely, limit the scope of his love. This man, instead, willingly dismissed his purpose for being there to ensnare Jesus and unashamedly embraced His truth. The man's voice rings with genuine conviction as he spontaneously rephrases the Scriptures in Jesus' answer, independently thinking it through and daringly concluding, "The ethical principles of love for God and man are superior to the entire Levitical sacrificial system." His instant enthusiasm for Jesus' answer is psychologically predictable, if we see his language as that of a man who had already pondered this question, reached a sounder conclusion than most of his peers, even if not generally accepted by them, but who finally heard his views confirmed by Jesus.

"You are not far from the Kingdom of God," is Jesus' assessment. "Not far," because he understood the high, ethical character of the Kingdom, and because he shared its spirit as a serious inquirer. Here is one Pharisee who can see that external forms and empty rituals amount to nothing unless motivated by a real love for God and man!

Here is one unprejudiced Pharisee open to truth wherever he finds it, able to think for himself, independently of party lines and approval. Jesus saw that he had a mind of his own (Mark 12:34: *nounechōs*, "having a mind"). No wonder this man arrested Jesus' attention! His approval of this Pharisee's progress is founded on the man's critical discernment blended with a meek, devout spirit, especially since this man was the Pharisean Head Inquisitor sent to test Jesus.

However, "not far from the Kingdom" does not mean "in it."

1. Jesus warns us indirectly that there can be non-Christians within the influence of true religion, who are able to give the right answers and even understand the spirit of Christianity better than legalists within the Church itself. But nearness is not possession. One is not in God's Kingdom merely because he is a diligent seeker or sensible enough to recognize truth when faced with it or because of his orthodox views. One must LOVE enough to pay the price of entrance and go on in!
2. Jesus encourages us to believe that a correct grasp of the message of the Old Testament really does fit the mind for understanding Christianity and readies one to grasp it when proclaimed. This man was "not far from the Kingdom," because to understand these two commands could lead to self-evaluation and recognition of his need to repent and seek God's forgiveness. To grasp this could lead him to ask Jesus the way, and to do this would open the Kingdom to him.
3. By saying, "not far," Jesus invited all such people to come all the rest of the way.

Even Mark did not finish the story: did this prospective convert go on in earnest conversation to ask Jesus those questions that would have taken him all the way into the Kingdom? To know that does not matter. What are YOU going to do?

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what general context did this event occur? In what week of Jesus' ministry?
2. What had taken place not long before this event? What is the local context? Had the Pharisees attacked Jesus before this? When? With what approach?
3. What had the Pharisees heard of the conversation between Jesus and the Sadducees?

4. According to Mark, what had a certain Pharisee noticed about the discussion between Jesus and the Sadducees?
5. What question is posed to Jesus?
6. Who is the questioner who asked it? What was his professional qualification?
7. What is stated about the man's motives?
8. Was Jesus' answer unique in the sense of being new revelation never before heard on earth? If not, who had given this answer before? Where, fundamentally, did the answer come from? Where are these two precepts found?
9. What, according to Jesus, is the first commandment? What text did Jesus cite to establish His point? (Give book, chapter and verse.)
10. What is the second commandment? What is the textual origin of this answer? (Give book, chapter and verse.) In what sense is the second commandment like the first?
11. To what is allusion made in the expression: "all the law and the prophets"? Discuss various ways love fulfills all that the Law and prophets intended to convey.
12. Explain how "on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."
13. In what terms does Mark describe the Pharisees' reaction to Jesus' answer? What did he say?
14. According to Mark, what judgment did Jesus pronounce upon the Pharisee?

#### D. JESUS' QUESTION ON THE SON OF DAVID

(Parallels: Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44)

TEXT: 22:41-46

41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, 42 saying, What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, *The son* of David. 43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, 44 The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet? 45 If David then calleth him Lord, how is he his son? 46 And no one was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How can you reconcile the fact that Matthew says Jesus' question was addressed to the Pharisees gathered together, whereas Mark pictures Jesus as teaching throngs in the Temple and addresses this question *about* the scribes to *others*?
- b. How would you explain Jesus' bringing up the question about the Son of David here in this day of controversies in the Temple? By presenting them this theological puzzle, is He doing it to show these critics that they were not so learned after all? Why must the Pharisees understand the correct answer to this vital question, before they can be saved?
- c. How does His question and its correct answer really lead them to the answer to their original challenge: "By what authority do you do these things and who gave you such authority?" (21:23)?
- d. How does His question and its correct answer really promote our understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Son? Do you think the Trinity doctrine is involved here?
- e. Why do you think Jesus brought up this particular Psalm to teach these Pharisees? What is its meaning, according to Jesus? Do you think He does it to deny that the Christ is to be the Son of David? If not, what is He driving at?
- f. What kept the Pharisees from being able to answer Jesus' question? Do you think it was their inability to accept Jesus as Son of God? Or was it their inability to conceive of a divine-human Messiah who was both "Son of God" and "Son of David"? Or is there some other reason?
- g. Why do you think they did not dare question Him any further after this?
- h. What is the peculiar value of Jesus' use of questions like this as a teaching method? What may we learn from His method of dealing with men?
- i. If Jesus did not reveal to these Pharisees unique or original information, but rather cited them a significant text out of their own Bible, indicating (1) the book in which the text is found, (2) the author of the text and (3) the inspiration of the author, what should we conclude about the text cited and about the Bible that included it? Do you think Jesus' word may be trusted on this subject, even if much of modern scholarship were to doubt the reliability of Jesus' conclusions?

- j. What is the effect of this text on you? If the Jews proved it humanly possible not to grasp the inner harmony between two apparently contradictory concepts well-grounded in Scripture, what of our weaknesses? Cannot human ignorance and bias blind me too as I write this study of Matthew? What should we do about this problem?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

As Jesus taught in the temple courts, He turned to the Pharisees still assembled and put this question to them, "What is your opinion about the Messiah? Whose son is He to be?"

They answered, "He is David's son."

"How can the theologians maintain that the Messiah is to be the SON of David? In fact, in the Book of Psalms David himself, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, refers to him as LORD, declaring: Jahvè said to my LORD, 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' So, if David himself can call him 'LORD,' in what sense is he his 'SON'?"

No one was able to reply to His question. From that day on no one presumed to ask Him any further trick questions. The great throng enjoyed listening to Him.

## SUMMARY

To give His adversaries a clue to His real identity and a means whereby they could save themselves, Jesus drew their attention to Scriptures that clearly pictured the Messiah as not merely the SON of David, but unquestionably his LORD. They were baffled to explain this apparent incongruency in their understanding of what the Christ must be. He had revealed their incompetence on a key issue, so they abandoned all attempts to out-manuever Him in open debate. Common people, however, relished listening to His teaching.

## NOTES

### I. A COMMON CONVICTION (22:41, 42)

22:41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question. (Cf. v. 34: "They came together" upon hearing

He had muzzled the Sadducees.) Now, blocked by the great throng (Mark 12:37) and stunned into inaction by the indisputable correctness of His answer to their question, the Pharisees become the captive audience for Jesus' penetrating analysis. Inflexible, unthinking monotheism might rightly affirm: "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that He is one, and there is no other but He . . ." (Mark 12:32), and still remain blind to the Scriptural doctrine of the Messiah's deity. The Legalists had queried Jesus about the Law. Now He must lead them to understand the Messiah. They would be but condemned by the Law's demand to love perfectly. They needed a divine-human Savior who could make them perfect and empower them to love. But they must understand who it is that will help them so they can recognize Him when He comes.

**22:42 saying, What think ye of Christ, whose son is he?** Still the question facing the world, why did Jesus ask it?

1. To bring everyone—disciples, crowds, even the Pharisees themselves—to see the blindness of the supposed learning to these teachers of the Law whose leadership so many revered. If rabbinic scholasticism could not answer a question concerning the basic concept of Messiahship, could their guidance be depended upon, if they refused to admit Jesus as Messiah? Jesus intends to open the eyes of those who followed blind guides (cf. 15:14).
2. To save the leaders themselves. His is no base attempt to embarrass them in debate or only to confuse them. His question clearly aims to lead them to clarify their own concepts by revealing the confusion that already reigns in their mind. The low-key approach even in His final question proves He wanted to lead them to see the truth and believe Him. To accomplish this, He used a sound pedagogic procedure:
  - a. He set truth in as neutral a setting as possible. Rather than direct attention to Himself, which would have only served to arouse their prejudice, He formulated a question in an objective form. Unlike the question asked the disciples (Matt. 16:13, 15), He was not asking them what they thought of Him as a potential candidate for Messiahship. Rather, He requested them to lay their own concept of Messiah out on the table for examination. This stimulated, rather than blocked, some real, deep thinking about this issue.

However, Lenski (*Matthew*, 884) believes this question was objective merely in form, because the events of the Last Week

with Jesus' Messianic Entry into Jerusalem surrounded by people glorifying Him as *the Son of David* and the children shouting in the temple, had raised the burning question: can this Nazarene be all that is claimed for Him? So the Pharisees "know that it was not an academic or a theoretical inquiry but the supreme question concerning his own person" (*ibid.*).

So we must not over-emphasize the objectivity of this question, as if Jesus' only purpose were to push the Jewish leaders to revise their entire theory of the Messiah. He did this much, but Jesus is not playing academic games with people who are "not far from the kingdom." He could save some of them. Others would mull over His meaning and perhaps accept it and Him. So, He was really hinting at a real application of this doctrine, even if at first glance it would seem to be purely theoretical. So, because they knew His claims and rejected them, He mercifully stated His question in as unprejudicial a manner as He could.

- b. He formulated two appropriate questions that went right to the heart of their problem. Because they would instinctively veto as heresy anyone's allegation to be both divine and human, He must make them see that they had misunderstood the prophets who had predicted a divine-human Messiah. These two questions, taken in their proper order, brought out the true prophetic message and contemporaneously showed the contradiction of the Jews' belief. But it was a well-tested didactic method for proceeding from the known and believed to the unknown and questioned.
  - c. He needed to save these leaders from their own pride, especially since they prided themselves on being the cream of Jewish scholarship (John 7:47ff.). Nothing could be more devastating to their theological arrogance than to be caught unprepared to answer a question so basic on an issue so fundamental as this.
3. To lead all to understand the Messiah's true identity. His question could not but have recalled to their mind the countless times He had been publicly acclaimed as *the Son of David* (Matt. 21:9; cf. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30). However, they answered without hedging: *they say unto him, The son of David.* II Samuel 7:13f.; 23:5; Psalms 78:68-72; 89:3f., 20-37; 132:11; Jeremiah 23:5f., are texts they could have cited in support of their answer. Jewish

scholars had already cited Micah 5:2 (Matt. 2:4-6; cf. John 7:42). Jesus too believed this—so far as it went. However, they occupied a grossly oversimplified, therefore mistaken, position, because they conceived of the Messiah as ONLY the son of David. What they believed was not totally untrue, just pitifully inadequate. While it is true that the Messiah is David's descendant, this was but a partial definition that stopped short of the whole picture the Old Testament draws of the promised Christ. Further, their grossly secular mental image of *the son of David* envisioned a restored, nationalistic Israel ruled in Jerusalem by the re-established government of David's line on a political throne. Although not without exceptions, the popular view of Messiahship involved national glory, political and military power and material wealth. (Cf. John 6:14f.; Matt. 20:20-28, Acts 1:6; cf. Edersheim, *Life*, II, Appendix IX; Psalms of Solomon 17:23-51.) Now, however, the moment has come to clear the air of these faulty notions however widely held they might be.

4. Another purpose (or was it result?) of Jesus' question was to teach that the revelation of God is not to be treated as a fallible textbook composed of contradictory statements. Edersheim, (*Life*, II, 406) summarized this:

As in the proof which He gave for the Resurrection and in the view which He presented of the Great Commandment, the Lord would point to the grand harmonious unity of Revelation. Viewed separately, the two statements [i.e. David's Son or David's Lord?] would seem incompatible. But in their combination in the Person of the Christ, how harmonious and how full of teaching . . . concerning the nature of Christ's Kingdom and of His work!

5. In the previous incident Jesus had underlined the unity of God (Mark 12:29, see notes on 22:37). In our present text His quotation of Psalm 110 pictures the Messiah as reigning together with God. So doing, Jesus demonstrated that God's oneness does not contradict the divine nature and authority of Christ.

## II. A CORRECTING QUOTATION (22:43, 44)

22:43 He saith unto them, How then doeth David in the Spirit call him Lord? Combining the three Gospels, notice the deliberateness

of Jesus' affirmation: (1) *David*, (2) *inspired by the Holy Spirit*, (3) "in the book of Psalms": what a powerful declaration of the authority of this text!

1. *David* himself, an authority higher than the scribes, should know what these theologians could but guess at! The astonishing fact is that the great king David, at the top of the Hebrew social pyramid, refers to Someone as his superior. Speaking as one of the people, he lays down his crown at the feet of another, a great King at God's right hand! And yet, this Psalm is messianic, concerning the Son of David, a fact that creates the puzzle: how can anyone at the same time be both inferior to another as his descendant and on a par with God as his Lord, i.e. both king and subject?
2. *inspired by the Holy Spirit*: Jesus alludes to a fact well-known, even claimed by David himself (II Sam. 23:1f.) and later repeated by Peter (Acts 2:30).
3. "in the book of Psalms" (Luke 20:42). This is not Luke's accommodation to aid non-Jewish readers, because Jesus actually said it. Otherwise, if Luke can adjust His words at will, how can we rely on his accuracy?

That the ancient Hebrews recognized both the inspired, Davidic authorship and Messianic nature of this Psalm is evidenced in the Jews' tacit acceptance of Jesus' statement of the case here. Otherwise, with the self-assurance of modern critics, they could have retorted, "But that Psalm is neither Messianic nor Davidic."

### WHAT IS JESUS' VIEW OF PSALM 110?

Plummer (*Matthew*, 311) feels that modern criticism's serious objections to the Davidic authorship of Psalm 110 may be fatal. (However, see Delitzsch, *Psalms*, III, 183f. for good defense of its Davidic setting. Cf. also Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 313ff.) Abandoning hope of certainty, Plummer tries to come to terms with Christ's argument by attempting three possible explanations of what might have happened here:

1. Our Lord is arguing from His opponents' own premises, expressing no opinion as to their correctness. . . . This is one of those "sayings in which He takes up ideas and expressions current at the time and uses without really endorsing them."

This argument is based on the ignorance of the Pharisees who wrongly thought David wrote the Psalm. Jesus knew better, but capitalized on their ignorance for His own purpose. We are left thus with an unethical Christ who established His holy identity by demonstrating the contrary, His lack of scruples.

2. In the limitations of knowledge to which our Lord submitted in becoming man, He Himself shared the belief, current among all the teachers of that age, that the Psalm was written by David.

This argument is based on Jesus' ignorance: He knew no better, so repeated the common mistake which only modern scholarship has "corrected." We are left with an ignorant and mistaken Messiah who by the use of an erroneous view, tried to convince others who shared the same error, of the truth of an erroneous conclusion!

3. The Psalmist lets David quote an utterance of Jehovah, . . . The argument of Jesus is based on David being the speaker of the words quoted; and this argument is "justified if the author of the Psalm lets David appear as spokesman. It does not require the Davidic authorship of the Psalm."

But in quoting this Psalm, Jesus presents an argument that turns on David's personally having spoken these words (*autòs David*, Mark and Luke). Jesus' argument against popular misuse of the "son of David" prophecies urges that David's own words be considered proof against a merely earthly Messiah. The argument is fallacious, if his authorship is not a fact. If the person who uttered the words were but a mere "literary personification of David," and not the great king of Israel in person, then Jesus' contention fails to prove His point. If a merely literary David said this *by the Holy Spirit* (Mark 12:36), perhaps the inspiration was purely literary too, i.e. not real.

Peter, inspired by the same Spirit, sets forth an argument based on David's personally having said this (Acts 2:30). His case is weakened, if David is not the writer. Because David did not personally ascend to God's right hand, he could not refer to himself when speaking these words. But it was a physical David, not a "literary personification" that spoke this, because Peter's argument depends for its force on its being the same David who did not go into heaven as the one who spoke Psalm 110:1.

It is mistaken to affirm, with Plummer (*ibid.*) that the question of Davidic authorship was not raised, assuming that, since the Pharisees did not raise it, no one else did. But JESUS raised it, by laying before His questioners what David himself said on the subject of his son the Messiah, in contrast to their own inadequate notions.

Our faith in Jesus as Revealer of the Father and complete Fulfiller of the Law and the Prophets must distinguish us from those who follow a fallible Jesus who is limited by the dubious intellectual climate of His age, and from those who, in the name of "modern scientific scholarship" oppose Jesus' evidence to the authorship of this text. Our love for Him disposes us to prefer His solid information to others' guesses. We respect His position to know (Matt. 11:27). We know what Spirit inspired Him to say this (Acts 10:38).

**22:44 The Lord said unto my Lord.** (Ps. 110:1; also cited in Acts 2:34f.; Heb. 1:13; alluded to in I Cor. 15:25; Heb. 10:12f. Study *Hebrews* as a virtual exposition of this Psalm.) The double use of *Lord* (both in Greek and English) might confuse the English reader, but the Hebrew is unmistakable: *Jahvè said to my Lord*, i.e. the Covenant God of Israel addressed a message to Him whom David describes as *my Lord*. It is not usual for a man to call his son his "lord" in the sense of "master, superior, benefactor." But if he does, it requires explanation, especially when the person who does it is someone as important for the salvation and glory of Israel as this ancestor of the Messiah. *Lord* not merely superiority of rank and ownership in this context, but also deity, since *Lord* (*adon* = *kùrios*) is used for God in Psalm 110:5.

*Sit at my right hand* pictures the glorious, heavenly reign of the Messiah sharing God's throne. (Cf. Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; Acts 5:31; 7:55f.; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; I Peter 3:22; Rev. 3:21.) This also harmonizes with the "Son of man" prophecy of Daniel 7:9-14. *At the right hand* is the highest place of honor (cf. Matt. 20:21) and to be invited to sit there by the King of heaven implies that the Messiah shares in His favor, His sovereignty and His power. Here especially it implies God's satisfaction with the Messiah will have completed His mission. (Study this Psalm as a virtual interpretative parallel of Psalm 2.) Now He is invited to occupy a throne which no mere mortal would dare accept. This hits hard at the Pharisees' grossly materialistic view of Messiah's Kingdom. His preeminent glory and power cannot be debased by restriction to a small, nationalistic throne on earth in some ancient city, be it even Jerusalem in

Palestine. Millennialists take note: David's throne is now occupied by its rightful Claimant. That throne is heavenly, *at God's right hand*, not material or earthly. The Jews misunderstood its spiritual character; can we do better? His rule involves the earth insofar as His armies now go forth in His name to conquer (Ps. 110:2). His Church began at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:4, 8) and continues to extend His mighty scepter in the midst of His enemies. "The day of His wrath" (Ps. 110:5f.) will conclude this era. So, the Messiah is not merely superior, but essentially similar, to David. Rather, He enjoys a nearness to God that is unique, absolutely unshared by any other son of David, including David himself who sat on a literal throne in Jerusalem.

*Sit* does not imply His entering into a period of inactivity and idleness. His enthronement is to Kingship, a fact shown by New Testament use of this Psalm. His sitting at God's right involves a ruling on earth "among His enemies" (Ps. 110:2) by means of His volunteer troops (Ps. 110:3; cf. David's own method, II Sam. 11:1), while He exercises the office of priest-king, like Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4). What mere human being, what Pharisean "son of David," could rightly accept this invitation to be elevated to such a relationship with God and wield all authority in heaven and on earth? (Cf. 11:27; 28:18.)

*Till I put your enemies under your feet.* God intends to defeat all Christ's enemies, subjecting them to His control (Heb. 10:13; I Cor. 15:24ff.; Eph. 1:21f.; but remember II Cor. 10:3-5!) This too harmonizes with Psalm 2. *Under your feet* pictures His opponents' public, humiliating subjection (cf. Joshua 10:24; I Kings 5:3) that leaves Him undisputed, universal Ruler. *Till* tells what God is doing during the epoch beginning from Jesus' exaltation and glorification until His coming again in judgment at the Last Day. The heavenly regency of the Messiah here described will not continue forever; just so long as it is necessary to triumph. The defeat of His enemies is the turning point at which another stage of God's rule shall begin. (Cf. Acts 3:21; I Cor. 15:24ff.) Who are the *enemies* of this heavenly King? The Psalmist's vision would suggest that the true enemies of the Messiah are not merely or even primarily those of the nationalistic Israel, but those of all men: sin, Satan and death. (Cf. I Cor. 15:26; Heb. 2:14f.; I John 3:8.) Unquestionably, however, among them are all those who oppose or even refuse to love the Lord (I Cor. 16:22; Ps. 2:12)!

## III. A CRUCIAL QUESTION (22:45)

22:45 **If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son?** Their view involved a difficulty: the two lines of prophecy are contradictory unless, in some way unguessed by these Pharisees, the Messiah could be both Son of David (human) and Lord of David (divine). Some have mistakenly supposed that Jesus' question intended to deny Davidic sonship. So far from denying it, He casts doubt on the worldly political sense usually attributed to it. The rabbis had chosen the wrong starting point and gone no further. Starting with earthly royal dignity in a restored kingdom, they concluded only in the temporal, the material and mundane. Had they used Messiah's heavenly Lordship as their point of departure, their minds might have been open to Someone superior to David on a spiritual level, even without the usual trappings of earthly royalty. Jesus' question not only exposed their theological disarray, but also generously indicated the road back to the truth. In fact, if the Holy Spirit who is the Author of both prophetic lines, is also a God of truth, to place both these Scriptures side by side should lead them to a broader understanding of the Messiah's nature and furnish them a better reason to accept Jesus' claim to Messiahship.

But note the form of His question. Unexpectedly, He does not say, "Now we all admit that the Messiah is to be David's Son, so how is it possible for Him also to be David's Lord?" Instead, His question, expanded, is, "We all admit the obvious implication of David's own confession that the Messiah is indisputably to be David's divine, exalted Lord. In what sense, then, must we understand that the Messiah is also David's SON?" This is by far the great question and more crucial for the Pharisees: how could a divine Being become also David's descendant?! What is the Lord implying? (See notes on 21:15f. where He dealt with the Son of David issue for the Sadducees too!)

1. "Do you realize that this Psalm means that the Christ will be a human being in whom are combined those traits that qualify Him to be David's Lord? This means that you could suddenly find yourself confronted by the great Lord of David, walking around in human flesh! It means that precisely because of His quite normal, unpretentious humanness and lack of the conventional majesty earth's nobility parades, you would mistake Him for any normal man. That is, until you heard Him speak, until you witnessed His

divine credentials, His miraculous deeds that sanction the highest claims He could ever make. Ever meet anyone like that lately?"

2. If anyone be thought to blaspheme by claiming to be both divine and human, both Son of God and Son of David, then the Old Testament itself must be rejected, because it too clearly predicted that the Christ must be both. However, since the Old Testament is Judaism's highest possible authority and rightly revered by the Pharisees themselves, then, if prophecy means anything, the true Messiah, when He appears, must necessarily claim to be both human and divine. Consequently, when ANYONE appeared on the scene making the claims that Jesus made, the Jews must objectively test his statements to determine whether this person is objectively the predicted Messiah. (See author's Vol. III, p. 377 on prophetic credentials.)
3. For Matthew's readers the correct answer need only be implied, since our author has already assembled all the data necessary to answer Jesus' question. It is now time for the reader to begin to face the issue and put the pieces together.
  - a. The genealogy placed Jesus solidly within the legal family of Davidic descendants (1:1-17).
  - b. The annunciation to Joseph unquestionably pointed to Baby Jesus' true Father, God, and His human mother, the virgin Mary (1:18-25). The Messiah's birth, then, is to be an incarnation, the process whereby David's Lord became David's Son. Eliminate the virgin birth of Jesus from the realm of true history and this quandary Jesus placed before the Pharisees becomes meaningless. The Pharisees could not deny the incarnation without surrendering the possibility of having any Christ at all! But to admit this meant that they—and anyone else—must accept Jesus as the only One qualifying to be the Christ. This, because the more fair-minded among the authorities admitted Jesus to be a "Teacher come from God, because no one could do these signs that you do, unless God be with him" (John 3:1f.; 12:42f.).
  - c. God's voice from heaven pointedly proclaimed Him God's Son (3:17).
  - d. For further materials collected by Matthew, see special study "Messiah" at the end of this volume.

So, Matthew's Gospel furnished his readers what these Pharisees had first-hand opportunity to investigate, the explanation that solved the conundrum: Christhood is founded, not exclusively on Davidic

lineage, but upon His true, divine sovereignty, precisely the way, centuries before, David had prophesied.

Why did Jesus not answer His own question? Would it not have been enlightenment for everyone—scribes, disciples and crowds alike? He chose rather to leave them intellectually stimulated to seek out the appropriate answer. By suggesting just enough to spur everyone's curiosity to want to investigate this mystery, He was leading them to imagine Messiahship in a way they had not thought of it before. Now it is up to them. Later, the same Spirit that inspired the prophets, would also inspire the Apostles to explain this mystery (Luke 1:31-35; John 1:1-18; Rom. 1:3f.; II Tim. 2:8; Rev. 22:16).

#### IV. ALL QUESTIONING CANCELLED (22:46)

**22:46 And no one was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.** (Cf. 22:34; Mark 12:34; Luke 14:6; 20:40.) Sadly, no Gospel text reports that, following these debates, Jesus' following increased due to an unprecedented influx of converted Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians. Unfortunately for them, their open attacks had succeeded in producing only negative results:

1. They had exposed their own moral poverty and professional incompetence by failing to discredit Him by the persuasiveness of well-reasoned theological argument. They only succeeded in revealing their own shallowness and ignorance.
2. On the other hand, they had involuntarily enhanced His stature as a teacher, His brilliance as a skillful debater and His prestige as an authoritative source of truth. He had taken positions that neither Pharisee nor Sadducee could really argue with, because based on principles to which no exception could be taken, His answers proved unanswerable.

So they retreated into expedient silence.

To His question about the Son of David, their reaction is not one of simple ignorance, but of prejudice. Jesus had unequivocally permitted Himself to be acclaimed as "Son of David" many times during His public ministry, especially during the Messianic Entry into Jerusalem (see notes on 21:1ff.) and openly claimed to be "Son of God" (cf. John 10:36; 11:27; 5:18; 1:49; Matt. 16:16). Anyone who had heard these two claims could combine them for the correct

answer: "The Messiah is both Son of God or Lord of David, and Son of David." But since these were unwilling to admit that Jesus was what He claimed to be, they refused to pronounce the answer that would support His claims and reveal their disbelief. There was no other possible answer, so they sweltered in red-faced silence.

Jesus was not merely a worker of wonders or a mover of the masses only. He was also a scholarly Teacher who could meet them on their own ground and defeat them with a simple question founded on their own beliefs, their own method of interpretation and their own Bible. His genius left them baffled, disarmed and embarrassed, and yet the calmness and power of His manners left them nothing to criticize. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 194f.) saw that

. . . in this part of Matthew's narrative, including all from the public entry of Jesus into the city until his arrest, Jesus is presented, not as a miracle-worker and a fulfiller of prophecy, but as himself a prophet. His miracles of power were chiefly, though not exclusively, wrought in Galilee and Perea, while his miracles of knowledge were wrought chiefly in the intellectual center of the nation.

That *no one dared ask Him any question* does not mean that no disciple dared bare his own ignorance before Jesus any more, but, simply, that no opponent could find the courage to continue this battle of wits with Jesus by asking Him questions to test or trap Him.

## WHAT DOES THIS SECTION REVEAL ABOUT JESUS?

Beautifully summarizing the day's debate, verse 46 is Matthew's conclusion of his major section that began in 21:23 with the rulers' challenge to Jesus' authority. This section's unitary character will be instantly recognized when it is seen how every pronouncement of Jesus thoroughly meets their demand for His credentials. During the course of this debate, two separate evidences for Jesus' claims emerge, noted by McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 194f.):

1. The evidence of character: Jesus lived the message He promoted, while the hierarchy and national leaders of Israel betrayed their ungodliness. In each separate encounter Matthew documents the dishonesty of the religious authorities as, first with one question and then another (five in all), they maneuver to destroy His popular

image. Time after time, they refuse to recognize or submit to the truth of His answers which objectively satisfied their challenges. They dodge the force of the eleven questions He put to them. When they answered His questions, their responses proved ruinous to their own position. When they saw this about to happen, they either simply refused to respond or loftily pretended to be unready to commit themselves. Because He had successfully unmasked the hypocrisy and wickedness of these pretenders, all fair-minded people could see that the arguments their nation's leaders hurled against His claims were biased. His own evident goodness and His enemies' lack of character is presumptive evidence in Jesus' favor. While it is not the only proof of the rightness of His claims, He too will submit to His own criterion for distinguishing true from false teachers: "By their fruits you will know them" (7:15-23). His godliness and wisdom and their lack of it give us reasonable ground for believing Him and not them.

2. The evidence of His supernatural nature and prophetic office:
  - a. He saw through their hypocrisy and exposed their well-planned intrigue. This may not seem to prove much, but ask what would have been the opinion of Jesus, had He failed to reveal their hidden motives.
  - b. He prophesied His own death and subsequent victory, the destruction of Jerusalem, the crushing end of the Jewish nation and the prevalence of non-Jews in the Messianic Kingdom. We may believe Him, because only a day or two from His execution, this Messiah is totally certain that the path of suffering would lead on to the throne, a certainty born out of the eternal purpose and planning of God and documented in Scripture.
  - c. He depended on Old Testament Scripture wherever new revelation was not required. By so doing, He remained solidly within the "prophetic context" of previous, well-authenticated revelations. (See the study "How to Avoid Becoming a Pharisee," Vol. III, 375ff.)

## WHAT DOES THIS INCIDENT REVEAL ABOUT OURSELVES?

From this incident let us learn to hold lightly to our opinions and interpretations of Scripture. If some Bible statement seems to contradict another, the fault does not lie in Scripture, but in the shallow

understanding and limited information of the fallible, human interpreter. Rather than discard Scripture or hold to one verse and reject or ignore another, let us let God be true and trust Him to know what He is saying and patiently ponder the meaning of ALL He says, until our bewilderment gives way before fuller knowledge and maturer understanding of the whole revelation!

This section proves that error about Jesus Christ is fatal error. What do we think about Him? Are our views merely based on a few scraps of Scripture, or are they formed by and grounded in all that God has spoken? Is Jesus for us simply the last link in a long chain of Davidic descendants and a merely interesting topic of conversation or debate? Or is He our divine Owner, Ruler and King to whom we submit our entire life and gladly give all our love?

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. At what point in the day's activities did Jesus ask the question about the Son of David?
2. During what major week in Jesus' earthly ministry did this question arise?
3. Who or what, in Jewish jargon, is "the Son of David"?
4. On what basis could the Pharisees questioned know to respond how to Jesus' question about the Son of David? What Bible verses could they have cited for their answer?
5. Whom did Jesus quote to demonstrate that their answer was inadequate?
6. Give the correct interpretation of the passage Jesus cited. Where is it found? Who wrote it? What does it mean? How was Jesus using it in His argument?
7. What does it mean for someone to "sit at God's right hand"? What does "making one's enemies a footstool" mean?
8. What according to Mark was the reaction of the common people to Jesus' teaching?
9. What, according to the united Synoptic testimony, does Jesus teach about (1) the location of the passage cited? (2) the authorship of the passage? (3) the inspiration of its author?
10. Where else in the New Testament is the passage Jesus quoted used to develop the Christian concept of His Messiahship? What interpretation is given in those passages?

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE OUTLINES

### SECTION 59

#### JESUS ATTACKS THE SIN OF THE "RIGHTEOUS" (23:1-39)

- I. TO THE CROWDS AND HIS DISCIPLES (23:1-12)
- II. TO THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES THEMSELVES (23:13-36)
- III. TO JERUSALEM, IDEAL OF THE NATION: (23:37-39)

#### A LIFE-SIZE PORTRAIT OF A RELIGIOUS COUNTERFEIT

- I. CONTRAST BETWEEN FALSE AND TRUE SPIRITUAL LEADERS (23:1-12)
  - A. Warning against false teachers (23:1-7)
    - 1. Whereinsofar their message is Mosaic, listen and obey (23:1-3a)
    - 2. But beware of their falsity and failure (23:3b-7)
      - a. Not practicing what they preach (23:3b)
      - b. Making religion unbearable (23:4)
      - c. Proud humility (23:5-7)
  - B. The essence of true religion and the character of its teachers (23:8-12)
    - 1. Its only, unmediated source of life, truth and direction is God (23:8-10)
    - 2. Its highest ambition is sincere, humble service to others (23:11f.)
- II. SEVEN SOLEMN DENUNCIATIONS OF HYPOCRITICAL RELIGION (23:13-29)
  - A. The Teaching of Error (23:13-15)
    - 1. Fanatic sectarianism blocks progress into the Kingdom (23:13)
    - 2. Partisan missionary zeal promotes false spirit (23:15)
  - B. The Imperceptiveness of Error (23:16-28)
    - 1. In the field of reverence toward God: no sense of awe before God (23:16-22)
    - 2. In the field of observance of duty: majoring in minors (23:23f.)
    - 3. In the field of personal holiness: (23:25-28)
      - a. Cleansing the outside
      - b. Concealing the inside (23:27, 28)

- C. The Punishment of Error (23:29-39)
1. For the multiplied guilt of murdering God's witnesses (23:29-36)
  2. For contempt for His marvelously patient compassion (23:37-39)

## SECTION 59

### JESUS ATTACKS THE SIN OF THE "RIGHTEOUS"

(Parallels: Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47)

TEXT: 23:1-4

1 Then spake Jesus to the multitudes and to his disciples, 2 saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat: 3 all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, *these* do and observe: but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not. 4 Yea, they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Although much of this sermon is directed to the "scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites," Matthew affirms that the message is initially spoken to "the multitudes and to His disciples." What do you think is Jesus' purpose for this kind of approach? Do you think that there were some scribes and Pharisees present among the crowds to hear Him say this? If His purpose is largely to criticize the scribes and Pharisees, why does Jesus bring the multitudes and His disciples into a question that directly involves others?
- b. What do you think is the crucial importance of mentioning Moses in this context?
- c. After all that Jesus has suffered at the hands of the scribes and Pharisees, and in view of how He condemns them, how can He possibly recommend that the nation do and observe all things that they bid? Is not this a self-contradiction? Do you think He approves the traditions of the elders as taught by these religious leaders?
- d. What arguments do you believe the religious leaders could have used to justify their creation of their "heavy burdens, grievous to

be born"? What do you think they were trying to accomplish this way?

- e. What arguments could these same religious leaders have offered for steadfast refusal to help people struggling under these religious burdens? In fact, how were they being perfectly consistent with their system by refusing to lighten these burdens?
- f. If the burdens placed upon people represented the conscientious thinking of the theologians, what motives should have convinced the latter that their own conscience had been wrongly educated or formed? Jesus thinks that they SHOULD have been ready to help people. What over-riding considerations could Jesus have cited to sustain this conclusion?
- g. What fundamental principle(s) are at the base of Jesus' argumentation in this section?
- h. When is it ever right to follow hypocrites? Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees "hypocrites," yet He pointed out one area in which it was absolutely obligatory service to God to follow their lead. What was this area? Do you agree with Jesus?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

In the hearing of all the people Jesus then addressed His disciples, "Beware of the theologians. They and the Pharisees represent the legitimate authority of Moses, sitting as teachers of his Law. So practice and observe what they tell you, but stop being guided by their lives. They do not practice what they preach. They enslave men's conscience with unbearable moral responsibilities. They themselves, however, make no exceptions for the hardship cases to which their casuistry leads.

### SUMMARY

Whereinsofar the theologians speak God's Word, follow them. However, beware of the hypocritical example that betrays their inconsistency and unfaithfulness to His Word. They make God's Word harder to practice than God Himself made it! Yet they do not help people to keep it.

## NOTES

## I. CONTRAST BETWEEN SPIRITUAL LEADERS

## Is Matthew Collecting Again, or Is This One Sermon?

23:1 **Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples.** Admittedly, Matthew definitely signals the beginning of a new discourse. However, these words do not necessarily disavow all connection with the controversies of the preceding chapter. They may simply suggest that Jesus' resounding victory over the enemies had prompted a murmur of enthusiastic approval that swept the gathered throng. Many listeners, loyal to popular leaders and parties, may have muttered tense disagreement. Others perhaps created an informal intermission by turning His answers over in their mind or by discussing them aloud with people nearby. Jesus, however, was not through with the Pharisean leadership of the nation. He must expose their hypocrisy and disabuse the public regarding its false heroes and effect their disaffection. So, He formally begins again to speak.

Some commentators confidently assert that Matthew has merely collected together here as one discourse some declarations Jesus made on various occasions. (Cf. Plummer, *Matthew*, 313.) Evidence offered for this conclusion involves the supposition that Matthew has done so elsewhere (i.e. chaps. 5-7, 10 and 13) and the fact that much of Matthew's material is also found in Luke 11:39-52; 13:34f.; 14:11; 18:14. Ironically, Plummer undermines his own theory by surmising (*ibid.*, 315), "It is not impossible that Christ may have made the charge on two separate occasions, and in both places the context is suitable," a true observation that may also be applied to the other supposed collections!

Further, the absence of any notice of change in the scene of Jesus' activities, beginning from the moment He entered the temple (21:23) until He left (24:1), argues that there is an uninterrupted connection between the wide-ranging debates with the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, chief priests and elders (Matt. 21, 22) and this divine counter-attack so very relevant and opportune under the circumstances. Additional corroboration comes from Mark (12:37f.) and Luke (20:45) who report the presence of a great, eager throng in whose presence Jesus spoke the words quoted by Matthew.

Another connection is the substance of Jesus' sermon put succinctly by Mark and Luke: "Beware of the scribes!" (Mark 12:38 = Luke 20:46). It was to the assembled crowds who had just witnessed the

scribes' inability to answer a plain question that they, of all people, *must* know (Mark 12:35), to whom Jesus directed this warning. The crowds had already begun to sense their leaders' theological incompetence. They must now also learn of their hypocrisy and wickedness, all of which had long been hidden under a veneer of pious respectability and idle, disputatious speculation that passed for serious reflection on God's Word. Matthew 23 is the sort of message to be expected in this context. Jesus' timely repetition of accusations here that He had made earlier (i.e. Luke 11:39-52; 13:34f.) should not surprise anyone, since the hypocrisy and presumption He targeted were widespread and needed repeated condemnation. The surprise, rather, is that Jesus should have repeated this discourse so seldom!

So, this verse is not merely literary device, but the necessary historical framework which introduces the sermon following. Those who doubt this must furnish valid textual or historical criteria for distinguishing what is here offered as the factual beginning of a single message, from any other objectively historical fact that Matthew records, like the resurrection.

**Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples.** Shocking, indeed, at first glance is the fact that our Lord should publicize the weaknesses of the religious leaders rather than discuss them with them privately (cf. 18:15). After all, what need did the multitudes and his disciples have, or what good could be served, that others' sins should be paraded this way and then criticized?

1. *The multitudes and his disciples*, most of whom were not from Jerusalem, but from Galilee and foreign countries, all too often followed these bigoted leaders, hence needed warning. His frank denunciations of the scribes aim at undermining the undeserved confidence that people placed in them. So long as others naively herded together behind "those saintly men," they would be torn between Jesus' revelations of truth and the slavery of conscience proclaimed by the Pharisees.
2. *The multitudes and his disciples* would be sorely tempted to imitate the human bibles their teachers so notoriously displayed. By setting His criticisms in a neutral setting, i.e. by condemning the scribes' conduct, Jesus did not attack the sins of His potentially savable audience directly. Rather, He objectified truth by applying it to others first, furnishing clear examples of what not to be or do. The prevalence of Judaizing tendencies in the early Church renders this major position statement imperative (Acts 15:5; Gal. 2:1-5).

3. The conscience of the nation was at stake. Must the Righteous One be silent while "the wicked freely strut about" and "when what is vile is honored among men" (Ps. 12:8)? The moral order is turned upside down, when men call evil Pharisees "good," but call humble, repentant publicans and harlots "bad"! Should not God's Prophet cry out against it?!
4. Just as the world needed to hear the Sermon on the Mount describe the ideal citizen of God's Kingdom, so it must now face the Christian's perfect opposite, the hypocrite. Jesus must decisively pronounce sentence upon the deadliest type of wickedness any age can produce: religious pretense. Disciples must learn not to confuse for Christianity a merely up-to-date copy of the same theological system or mentality that Jesus Himself unsparingly refused to tolerate. The inability of the modern Christian unflinchingly to identify with Jesus' anti-Pharisaic polemic gauges his own degree of sympathy more with those who murdered Him, than with Christ Himself. (Cf. Bruce's eloquent defense of this discourse against those who criticize Jesus. *Training*, 318ff.)
5. This sermon is no mere exposé of uniquely Pharisean sins. Jesus is hammering at real, universally human problems produced by self-righteousness, sectarianism, evasion of responsibility, indifference to social justice, exaggerated emphasis on religious trivia, self-glorification, etc. in short, by selfishness and sin in any age. To conceive of Matthew's major concern behind his inclusion of this major anti-Pharisaic polemic in his gospel as mainly to meet the danger of the Pharisean sect's influence in his local area or congregation(s), is to miss the far broader human temptation Pharisaism represents for every century and culture. Although the SECT of Pharisees has no appreciable influence on the Church of Jesus Christ today, the SPIRIT behind Pharisaism, its attitudes and poisonous fruits are anything but dead and gone!
6. Because this was to be Jesus' last public address, it was His final opportunity to admonish the Jewish leadership personally. They had just demonstrated themselves incorrigibly closed to His truth (chap. 22). There was no winning them right now. So, as a class, their leadership is in question and on trial. Should not the Judge of all earth do right?! Jesus is JUDGE (John 5:22, 27, 30; I Cor. 4:3ff.; II Cor. 5:10). Not only can He infallibly expose the thoughts of men's hearts (John 2:25; Rev. 2:18, 23), but also His sense of right timing for exposing hypocrites to others' gaze is unquestionable.

7. Those who allege that Jesus failed to be true to His own ethic by failing to love His enemies and by exposing the Pharisees and scribes to this scathing denunciation, forget that this exposure of hypocrisy and adulteration of godliness is no evidence of *personal*; enmity or *personal* bitterness. Rather, what stirred Jesus' righteous indignation was the monstrous debasement of true religion and the gross misrepresentation of His Father's Word. His wrath is not motivated by personal bitterness gone amok. This is godly anger against evil. Had our Lord NOT been deeply stirred by the evils He uncovered here, or had He toned down their seriousness, His would have been a faithless, courageless betrayal of God's truth! Because Christians too are sometimes called to this painful task (cf. Acts 20:29; II Cor. 11:13; Gal. 2:14; Phil. 3:2; I Tim. 5:20), we would do well to study His motives and His methods.

The multitudes, by contrast, who had already gravitated to Jesus' side and eagerly drank in His message (Mark 12:37), unlike His critics, had heard His commendation of the wise Pharisee (Mark 12:34) and they would hear His sad lament over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37ff.), and so were in a better position to sense that He loved people as dearly as He loved truth and hated iniquity and what it did to both. There is no evidence that these multitudes were disappointed by Jesus' attitude, no suspicion that He withheld love from the Pharisees or were treating them with inhumanity.

For months Jesus' enemies had attempted without success to expose Him as unfit to lead the nation. Now, with a few swift strokes that sketch typical Jewish scholarship at its best as hypocritical, Jesus masterfully unseated His opposition. Mingled with indignation and heartbreak, His charges warned Israel that its apparently most pious men were fakes, and that truth and godliness must be found elsewhere—in Himself alone.

**Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples.** Luke has: "in the hearing of all the people, He said to His disciples. . . ." All heard, but His specific objective was to instruct His own followers. Were the scribes present to hear Jesus' introduction?

1. How could they escape and return for the second part (cf. 23:13ff.).
2. Jesus' addressing the disciples and crowds does not exclude the scribes' being present to face Jesus' disapprobation implied in the first part (23:1-12). Just because He did not address them directly does not prove they were not there.

3. By addressing the crowds, rather than the scribes first, Jesus achieved a precious, psychological advantage. The crowds would press in to hear teaching addressed specifically to them, and, by their massive interest in what He had to say, would stymie any counterplanning the muttering scribes still present might attempt.

**23:2 The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat.** *Moses' seat* is his cathedra, his "Bible Chair" from which his doctrine is read and expounded. In Malachi's day it was the priests who had the magisterial responsibility (Mal. 2:7ff.), a duty as old as the priesthood itself (Lev. 10:17; Deut. 17:9-13). But with "Ezra the priest and scribe" (Neh. 12:26) the function began shifting onto professional *scribes* (Neh. 8:4, 7-9, 13, 18; cf. Ezra 7:1-6, 10). Many such scribes were still within the priesthood, a phenomenon still reflected in the New Testament where "scribes of the Pharisees" are mentioned (Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30; Acts 23:9), a fact that implies there were also "scribes of the Sadducees," the priestly party. The scribes, because of their familiarity with Moses' Law, were recognized as the authorized theologians and seminary professors in Israel. *Moses' seat*, in Jesus' day, could be found throughout Israel, wherever "from early generations Moses has in every city those who preach him, for he is read every sabbath in the synagogues" (Acts 15:21). *The Pharisees* come under Jesus' fire, because their party zeal strenuously applied the theologians' legalistic conclusions to everyday life with a rigor that required everyone to fall in lock-step behind them. In this sense, the Pharisees, too, were Israel's teachers, even if unofficially. As a reform movement in Judaism, they aimed to keep the nation pure, truly a people of God, obedient to the Law, living out its requirements in everyday life. Personally determined to root out laxness and restore God's Word, Pharisees won Israel's praise and respect for their diligence and conscientiousness. Where they went wrong Jesus will point out. But here He must mention them, because, despite their faults, they uphold Moses, as opposed to the paganizing leadership of the Sadducean priesthood. So, although the *scribes* were really the official teachers, the addition of *Pharisees* here is not a mistaken embellishment by Matthew.

Moses' Law was yet in force, therefore to be obeyed by those subject to it. At Christ's death, the Mosaic dispensation officially expired. But until it did, that Law was God's Word to Israel, and, for most people in Israel, the scribes remained the chief, if not the only, accessible source of information regarding the Law. His implication

is clear: whatever comes from Moses is from God and to be received with full confidence and submission, Merely because Jesus must undercut the unjustified pretensions of the Jewish magisterium does not mean that Moses must go too. So, before beginning His condemnation of the unfaithfulness and sinful conduct of the religious leaders, He calls for sincere reverence for God's Law.

So, by saying, *the scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat*, Jesus merely states the fact, without necessarily praising or blaming them. The question now, however, is where do we go from here? This He answers next.

### Lack of Sincere Earnestness and Personal Consistency

23:3 **All things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe.** Therefore (*oñn*) introduces, not a justification of Pharisean occupation of the teaching chair, but information: "Given the present situation, you should act as follows." And yet, when this apparently unqualified statement is weighed in the light of the general New Testament picture of these scholars' unrelenting opposition to Jesus, His words are shocking and appear quite mistaken. How could He justify this encouragement to follow those whom He must characterize elsewhere as "thieves and robbers" and against whose deadly, insidious influence He had warned His followers (John 10:1; Matt. 16:12)? Several reasons for this admonition might be:

1. He does not intend their human traditions. Because Jesus publicly and resolutely repudiated all that is inconsistent with God's Law (Matt. 15:1-20), it is clear that He means *all that they bid you* that is in strict harmony with Moses' Law, not their multitudinous technicalities, frivolous traditions and other rules that are contrary both to its letter and its spirit. It is rather when *they sit on Moses' seat* that they are to be heard, i.e. when they teach the Law itself. His criticism is that *they say* (what is recognized as divine truth) *and do not*. Jesus' present accusation is not that they do not preach Moses at all, but that they do not practice what Moses demands. So, He draws a sharp distinction between the office and the men who hold it. The office is to be respected for its lawful teaching and exposition of the Law, because it carries out Moses' function in Israel, i.e. that of teacher of God's will.

We must not abolish authority structures in the Church merely because some office holders abuse their powers. Rather, we must raise up better men who will do honor to their position and thereby honor God, not self. Jesus did not eliminate *Moses' seat* merely because it was temporarily occupied by hypocrites. Rather, He sent Israel some NEW "prophets, wisemen and scribes" filled with God's spirit and message (23:34).

What a time for Jesus to express Himself like this! On the very day when these hard-nosed legalists and scholars had shown no reluctance to question His authority, our Lord shows no reluctance to uphold what is legitimate in theirs! No sooner had they most severely brought their high position into disrepute by attacking Him, than He holds their position in highest repute! When they were cocksure, He defeated them. Now that they have crumbled, He sustains their right to teach!

2. This order to listen to the scholars as they taught Moses' Law is absolutely essential in Jesus' thought, because Moses' teaching was intended to prepare men for Christ (Gal. 3:24; John 5:45ff.). Jesus could not undermine the authority of Moses without destroying the basis upon which He intended to establish His own. (See notes on 5:17.)
3. Further, He refused to throw out the precious with the worthless, the Old Testament along with the traditions. With even-handed moderation He could distinguish between the true message of the Old Testament and the corrupt and corrupting interpretations and practice by these scholars. Unfortunately, those who admire Jesus have not always followed His lead. They reject not only a corrupt Church but also the Church's Bible which could yet lead them back to truth.
4. Nor would Jesus have these Hebrews reject conscience. Since early childhood they had been led to believe that their leaders' traditional interpretations and public practice were as much a part of the truth of God as His very revelations. Until the majority of Jesus' followers grew into greater maturity through an increased knowledge of God's new revelation, they would not be in an adequate position to distinguish the true gold of the Old Testament from the "fool's gold" of human tradition. (Consider Acts 11:1-3 as illustrating how slowly traditions were overcome.) However wrong their present habits might have been in the light of the Old Testament, these convictions had been arrived at more or less conscientiously.

Jesus would re-educate their conscience through the Gospel, but until then, He would not for an instant encourage unconscientiousness, even though this behavior represented enthusiasm for His movement. (Cf. Rom. 14:14, 23; I Cor. 8:7.)

*These do and observe (polésate kai terête).* If Jesus intends to distinguish doing and observing, perhaps the tenses (aorist and present imperative, respectively) indicate the difference:

1. *Do*: "perform each duty as the opportunity presents itself."
2. *Observe*: "Make habitual observance your regular manner of life and practice."

For the Hebrews before the cross, to obey the scribes is to obey Moses, and to submit to Moses is to please Jesus. Jesus could have agreed with much of the Pharisean exposition of Moses' Law. In fact, in general, many of His own views were mirrored in Pharisean tenets (cf. Acts 23:6, 8). He only opposed what in their system contradicted God's intentions in the Old Testament. But, in the main, Pharisees were extremely conservative. So, when they preached what Moses said and meant, Israel was to pay attention.

*But do not ye after their works.* The rest of this chapter will amply illustrate which Pharisean works Jesus rejects and are not to be considered normative for God's people. *Their works* are the natural outgrowth of a broad, fundamental failure:

1. *They say and do not*: i.e. lack of personal consistency. Although they preach Moses' truth, they vitiate it by their habit of not obeying its plain import themselves. They either flagrantly violated what he taught or by their twisted interpretations that broke the force of God's commands, they excused their not doing what was required by the plain force of Moses' precepts.

The painful truth is that not even the practice of the most orthodox and conscientious of preachers today is absolutely consistent with all the truth they know and believe. Therefore, Jesus warns, the revealed will of God remains the standard under whose judgment everyone stands—teachers and taught alike. None can excuse himself for failure to practice what he knows of God's will, merely because he never saw anyone doing it. Each is to be judged on his own grasp of the Word, not on the malpractice of others, be they leaders or not. This makes everyone responsible, not for his teachers' practice, but for his own and for whether or not it mirrors

God's will correctly stated by even the worst of preachers. We must not misjudge or fail to receive and practice God's truth, merely because it is preached by bad men!

2. *They say and do not.* Although the Pharisees actually observed hundreds of things commanded by Moses, they did not do them with the motives, in the spirit and for the purpose God intended. Rather, they acted for human applause and to put God in debt to them. Again, they scrupulously followed the external regulations rather than develop the inward character that would fulfill their moral duty to be just, merciful and trustworthy. So, regardless of how many works they did, their motives kept erasing them from God's record. So, God counted none of their works as ever having been done.
3. *They say and do not.* Though they are most demanding that others bend their will to obey God, they reserve to themselves a freedom to disobey which they deny to others. The fact that *they say* proves that they do know. Otherwise, how could they repeat God's will for others? *They do not*, then, means that they are substituting knowledge for practice. Often this overemphasis on the intellectual part of Christian knowledge is paired with a corresponding deficiency in morally lax conduct. (Study I Cor. 8.) This kind of hypocrisy tempts believers in any age, because God's will is easier to talk about than to do.
4. *They say and do not.* Lenski (*Matthew*, 895) is right to remind us of the broad, fundamental principles of Old Testament religion that Pharisaism generally garbed in their transmitting it and bungled in their practice. God's plan of salvation has always been the same: consciousness of sin, repentance, faith in His grace and obedience to whatever He commands, all out of love and gratitude toward God. (See notes on 7:21-23; 21:30; 23:23.) Unquestionably, Pharisean doctors read and commented upon the Old Testament texts that uplift these grand concepts, but, by a slavish system of self-justification, they muddled and consequently did not practice what God intended to save them. Remember Paul's commentary in Romans 2! (Cf. Rom. 9:30—10:3; 11:6f.)

But who is Jesus to pass sentence on Israel's leaders' failure to measure up, unless He too says and does God's will perfectly (John 5:19-47; 6:45-51, 68f.; 7:16-18; 8:26, 29, 46f.; 10:25, 37f.; 12:44-50; 14:6). Is this censure merely another manifestation of superficial holiness and greater pride, or, rather, an expression of His true

moral perfection that is the highest imaginable qualification for judging? (Study Luke's sentence: "Jesus began (1) to do and (2) teach," Acts 1:1.)

### Harshness and Lack of Human Sympathy

23:4 **Yea, they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.** Freely reworked by Jesus, this rabbinic allusion to the binding of doctrines on people's conscience (see notes on 16:19, "binding and loosing") pictures someone tying loads to be carried by a bearer. Although he makes them too heavy for the man to carry, the indifferent leader offers no assistance, but stolidly continues to insist that the load be borne as is. But what are the *heavy burdens*?

1. The Law merely? Because the Jewish scholars are scored for saying but not doing (v. 3), Alford (226) and Plummer (*Luke*, 312) argue that the *heavy burdens* cannot be human rules, but the rigorousness of Moses' Law, because they would not neglect their own traditions. Lenski (*Luke*, 664) adds that these lawyers force others to carry the Old Testament requirements but would not themselves even pretend to observe them. These views, however, fail to grasp the spirit of Pharisaism that could cheat both on the rabbinical traditions and on Mosaic legislation whenever convenient or supposedly "necessary."
2. The Law and its interpretations? Although Jesus says, *they bind*, he does not necessarily limit the *heavy burdens* to traditions in antithesis to the Law, because Pharisees considered both as binding. In fact, to the Pharisean mind, the Law and its traditional interpretations, taken together, became one divine entity, one divine Law, from which nothing could be omitted.
  - a. *Heavy burdens* is decidedly the right word! Their earnest legalism produced one dismal result: they turned the piety expressed in the Mosaic ordinances into the observance of a myriad of minute traditions and rabbinical decisions that touch all of life. So doing, they turned what was intended to be a joyous help to bring man to God, into an unbearable, depressing deadweight that must be borne without any hope of succeeding perfectly.
  - b. The Law itself was heavy enough (Acts 15:10), without innumerable additions besides, not to mention those subterfuges whereby a Pharisee could excuse himself for any lack of strictness in keeping what he did not want to. (Cf. the "Corban"

rule, 15:4-6 = Mark 7:9-13; special ways of hand-washing, Mark 7:3; and oath formulas, Matt. 23:16ff.)

How, then, did their system lead to the evil results Jesus denounces? Beginning from Moses' Law, the scholastics in Judaism had created a total legal system that closed up all the loopholes God intentionally left open in His system. By creating laws where God made none, they took away human freedom to think responsibly and to make free decisions where God intended to develop this very maturity. (See "How to Avoid Becoming a Pharisee" in my Vol. III, 375ff. where this problem is discussed at length.) Generally interpreting the unclear issues on the side of greater rigor, they tended to make the Law severer than originally intended by God. They only succeeded in producing a sterner, more impossible law that must necessarily condemn all those who lived under it, but could not observe it perfectly. They had never learned "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." (See on 9:13; 12:7.) Not understanding grace, they turned everything else into more LAW. How closely do modern legalists follow this pattern?

**But they themselves will not move them with their finger.** It misunderstands the main thrust of legalism to suppose that Pharisees could have seen the need to get these exasperating restrictions abolished. For the legalistic mentality can have no such intention, because it aims at inventing even more rules to cover every imaginable exigency. So, naturally, they could never think of removing them! Their sin lies elsewhere, but how did Jesus intend His criticism? Does He mean (1) *move them* (the burdensome laws) by obeying them personally, or (2) *move them* by assisting the burdened people to bear them by taking their life situation into account or by mercifully coming to the aid of unprosperous, adversely affected people?

1. Is it that they are severe with others, but indulgent toward themselves? If so, they do not even try to observe the very rules they themselves make, while justifying their own real evasions of duty. If so, then Jesus means they must be consistent with their teaching. The fact that "they say but do not do" (v. 3) seems to support this conclusion. However, by supposing that Jesus meant they never kept their own rules, Bruce (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, 279) must take this verse with reservations, since "teachers who absolutely disregarded their own laws would soon forfeit all respect."
2. The leaders callously offered no help to the burdened people of God, mercilessly demanding that each bear his own load without

any help from them. Edersheim (*Life*, I,101) taught that "these burdens could be laid on, or moved away, according to the varying judgment or severity of a Rabbinic College," decided by whether or not a "majority of the congregation is able to bear it." So, the precedent had already been established for deciding issues in line with humane considerations, but Pharisees tended to make the requirements as rigorous as possible! Their interpretations led to impossible legal demands so time-consuming that only people of means and free time really hope to observe them all. The net result of this policy was to produce a proud elite, capable of doing these exceptional, difficult rules, an exclusive group of insiders who alone were "the pure and holy."

Contrast their attitude with the yoke and burden of Jesus (11:28-30), or with the attitude of the early Christians (Acts 15:28; I Cor. 7:28; 9:12) and the burdens laid upon believers by their leaders! Here, then, is one striking difference between Jesus and legalists and between their respective approaches to human problems. Pharisees care more about their rules than they do about people, but Jesus keeps God and people at the center of His concern. Programs and procedures, laws and institutions are made to help people obey God. But when they become more important than people, or when they damage or harrass them, then they have become an obstacle to God and people. According to Jesus, then, men may and must remove these burdensome accretions to God's Word, lightening the load on people's conscience and restoring their moral energy to do the things that bless.

### Criterion of False Religion

When irrational, inhumane demands that God did not make are multiplied supposedly to render possible total legalistic obedience to God, this is not the Christianity Jesus has in mind. When people submit to authority God did not authorize and obey anything else in addition to His Word, this is not true religion, but an indiscriminating slavery to human opinions. Mere proclamation of God's truth, unaccompanied by practical submission to its ethical demands, is also false religion.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. To whom is the message of this chapter addressed, according to Matthew?

2. What is "Moses' seat"? Where was this "seat" located? How could so many people sit on it?
3. What unusual order did Jesus give His disciples with reference to the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees? Why did He require this?
4. What is meant by the expression, "whatever they tell you": the law of God? the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees? or both?
5. What, according to Jesus, is the reason for not learning proper conduct from the religious leaders' example?
6. What are the "heavy burdens, grievous to be borne" laid upon men's shoulders?
7. In what way are the religious leaders particularly guilty for "not moving them with their finger"? That is, how SHOULD these leaders "move (the burdens) with their finger"?
8. In what way does Jesus defend the high importance of the Old Testament in this section?
9. In what way does the teaching of this section compare with the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount?

#### TEXT: 23:5-12

5 But all their works they do to be seen of men: for they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of *their garments*, 6 and love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 and the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called of men, Rabbi. 8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren. 9 And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, *even* he who is in heaven. 10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, *even* the Christ. 11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant: 12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted.

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What is the difference between the Pharisees' sin of doing "all their works to be seen of men" and Jesus' exhortation to Christians to be "the light of the world . . . the salt of the earth . . . a city set on a hill" with the objective of "letting your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works"? How can Jesus promote the one and condemn the other?

- b. On the basis of Jesus' warnings here, do you think it is wrong
  - (1) for people to be specially noticed by the type of "religious clothes" they wear? How do you feel about robes and stoles for preachers or choir members who represent God in sermon and song?
  - (2) for certain men to be referred to as "Doctor Jones," "Brother Jones" or by some other distinguishing title given them because of their religious or scholarly distinctions above their brethren?
  - (3) for anyone to be honored by special notice, special placement or seating or special greetings?
- c. By what right does Jesus in the same context associate Christ, as the one master of all, with "your Father" as their only true Father? Is this not implying something about the identity and position of the Christ?
- d. How did Jesus prove Himself worthy of our highest praise as the greatest of all?
- e. How did this section show that the Pharisees transgressed the first commandment to love God and the second commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"Everything they do is calculated to attract the attention and approval of others. In fact, they enlarge the Scripture-text boxes they wear on their foreheads and arms, and on their robes they lengthen the tassels that remind them of the Law. They enjoy walking around in their long robes, symbols of their scholarly rank. They love to be greeted respectfully in public places, to sit in the most important seats in the synagogues, the places of honor at banquets, and to be addressed as 'doctor.' They grow fat on widows' houses and, to hide the true state of things, pray long prayers. They will receive the more severe punishment!

"But you must not allow yourselves to be called 'doctor,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers in relation to each other. Address no man on earth as your 'spiritual father,' for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Further, you must not allow yourselves to be considered 'leader,' since you have one Leader, the Messiah. The true 'superior' among you is the one who serves others best. The person who proudly promotes his own interests shall be humiliated,

but the one who humbly puts himself at the service of others shall be honored.”

## SUMMARY

All ambition for distinction above other common disciples of Jesus is condemned, whether this expresses itself by ostentation in dress, by prestigious titles or by positions of public honor. Such ambition despises the common brotherhood of all believers, ignores Him who is truly Father, and abases the Christ as unique leader. True superiority in God's Kingdom is decided on the superiority of one's humble service. Humiliation and punishment await those who crush others to promote their own interests.

## NOTES

### The Exhibitionism of Arrogant Pretenders

**23:5 But all their works they do to be seen of men.** While the Pharisees may have often violated their understanding of the Torah and its interpretations privately, that they NEVER kept them is proven untrue by this verse. Jesus affirms that they showed their great earnestness by keeping them publicly. So, He censures their base motive: they advertize their piety! He is not criticizing mere public notice, as if all kind helpfulness and generosity must be done in absolute secrecy. (See notes on 6:3, 4.) The Lord had already urged His followers to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the city set on a hill, “so that men may see your good works and glorify your Father” (5:13ff.). But this laudable goal for doing good in public did not satisfy the hypocrites' ambition, since their aim is to divert glory from God to themselves. (See notes on 6:1, 2, 5, 16.)

To long to be more really righteous than others is an appropriate aspiration. However, to long for the reputation and praise for it is evidence of an ambitious pride. Exceeding others in genuine goodness is Christian (Rom. 12:10), but this cannot be gained by a self-advertising ostentation. Jesus' disciples are not to be dazzled by the pious pomp others paraded in awesome ceremony. And there before Jesus in the audience sat living object lessons, Pharisees with their enlarged fringes dangling and their conspicuous phylacteries on their foreheads like a spot of leprosy. Others may have been intimidated by such display. Jesus sees right through it.

**They make broad their phylacteries.** Taking passages like Deuteronomy 6:8; 11:18; cf. Exodus 13:9, 16, literally, the stricter Hebrews created a small leather box to be strapped (hence called *tephillin* "straps" in Hebrew) either on the left arm or on the forehead between the eyes or both, naturally with the proper prescription for tying it on "correctly." (See *I.S.B.E.*, 2393.) In exactly four compartments (no more nor less!) the box contained scraps of Scripture such as Exodus 13:3-21; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21. God had not intended such gross literalism. That He spoke figuratively is evident from other figurative expressions in these texts that are not taken literally by those formalists. He meant, rather, "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds, making them the object of your meditation (bind them on your forehead), make them the motive of your daily actions (tie them on your hands)."

Beyond the unthinking literalism involved in wearing the phylacteries, their Greek name comes from *phylàsso* which means "to guard or protect" and refers to something that preserves or defends, hence a "fort or military station; preservative or defense; amulet or talisman" (Rocci, cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 876). This latter definition points to a superstitious use of these boxes as protection against harm or demons, an evidence of less than total trust in a living God.

**They enlarge the borders of their garments.** These *borders* are the tassels with the blue cord to remind the wearer to remember the Lord's ownership and obey all His commands (Num. 15:37-41; Deut. 22:12). However, the Law had not prescribed the length. So, to make them exceptionally long was popularly thought to distinguish the wearer as specially pious.

Note that Jesus does not condemn the wearing of phylacteries per se nor does He forbid the fringes. In fact, even He wore these tassels (Matt. 9:21f.; 14:36). Rather, He denounces the wearing of king-sized phylacteries and extra-long tassels that aimed at rendering the wearer more conspicuous to others as more conscientious and holy. But the scribes' public strolling in long, flowing robes (*stolé*: Mark 12:38 = Luke 20:46) intentionally sets them apart as persons of distinction. Broad fringes on their flowing robes combined to make their elegance also holy! Even if phylacteries were only worn during prayer, Pharisees loved to pray publicly! (Cf. 6:5; Edersheim, *Life*, I, 624f., esp. note 1, p. 625.)

Does this criticism of Pharisees' distinctive dress bear on our approach to clothing? Jesus rejects external signs flashing the wearer's

piety. What of modern Christians who wear gaudy crosses “for a Christian testimony”? Contrast the unexceptional simplicity with which Jesus garbed Himself. How strikingly unlike the grand garments worn by the Pope and his imitators and colleagues!

### Love of Power

**23:6 They love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues.** (Cf. Luke 11:43; contrast John 13:4f, 12-17.) The *chief place* signified prominence at those meals where guests would be invited. So, to be ushered to the best place meant recognition as someone of importance. (Cf. Josephus, *Ant.*, XV,2,4; XX,3,2.) The custom of reclining on the left elbow on couches organized fan-like around three sides of a table, led people to consider the place farthest to the left as the most desirable. This position permitted the one reclining there to view the whole banquet table without having to lean back or turn his head. (Cf. John 13:25; see *I.S.B.E.*, 2015.)

*The chief seats in the synagogues* were located near the end of the building where the scrolls of the Law were kept in a chest called the holy ark. These seats faced the congregation and were occupied by its leadership. These places of honor represented power in the congregation, the equivalent of being ushered to a place on the speaker’s platform front and center in today’s churches. There none could miss their sanctimonious pose. But they did not love such prominence merely for the psychological satisfaction of sitting “up front.” It was rather for the POWER that their ambition demanded to wield. Thus, their seeking precedence and prominence was all calculated to promote their own self-advancement. Such vain persons could have retorted, “Well, SOMEONE has to sit in the chief seats! This honor is rightly mine: I earned it and I shall enjoy it!”

According to Jesus, their mistake lies not in claiming what is their rightful privilege, but in their taking puerile delight in it, loving it, expecting it. Their resentment, when others were honored above them, accurately gauged how real and deep this self-worship was. This is no harmless pastime, because Jesus must expose this love of eminence and foolish pride of those whose ego-feeding depended on it (Luke 14:7-11). Note even James and John were immune to this ambition (20:20-28). This kind of self-love is an effective barrier to faith (John 5:44)! John attacked this sin, naming the offender: “Diotrephes, who loves to be first” (III John 9f.). Sadly, the very disciples themselves

who heard this warning, forgot it and squabbled over the best seats at the Last Supper (Luke 22:24 as background for John 13:2-17)!

### Drive for Recognition

23:7 (They love) the salutations in the marketplace, and to be called of men, Rabbi. The *marketplace* (= *agorà* is Greek for the Latin *forum*) is not only the place where commerce was carried on, but was also a place of public concourse where public meetings assembled. Hence, to receive these ceremonious *salutations in the marketplaces* meant to be recognized as somebody important. *To be called of men, Rabbi*, meant a recognition of one's superior culture and grasp of the Law. This sin lies in loving these pompous titles and obsequious greetings and basking in the blighted glory of human praise. (John 5:44; 12:43; Rom. 2:29; contrast I Cor. 4:1-5; I Thess. 2:6.) To seek to be called *Rabbi* is to pretend higher respect than that granted to one's earthly parents, because these only communicated ordinary physical life to the child, but the rabbi confers on him spiritual life. *Rabbi* is Hebrew: "my Great One," but with the coloring of "Master" (*kùrios*) and not merely "teacher" (*didaskalos*). (Kittel, T.W.N.T., VI, 962). From this point of view, the rabbi is higher than king, because, theoretically, he teaches the counsel and sound judgment, the understanding and moral strength by which kings reign and judges make laws. No wonder status-seekers in a religious state would seek to be publicly honored by this title! Nevertheless, Matthew Henry (V,331) exposed the disqualification involved in turning into religious self-admiration what should have never been more than an example of good manners.

For him that is taught in the word to give respect to him that teaches is commendable enough in him that gives it; but for him that teaches to love it, and demand it, and affect it, to be puffed up with it and to be displeased if it be omitted, is sinful and abominable; and, instead of teaching, he has need to learn the first lesson in the school of Christ, which is humility.

### The Essence of True Religion and the Character of Its Teachers

23:8 **But be not ye called Rabbi.** This section (vv. 8-12) is particularly addressed to His disciples. Note the emphatic pronoun, *YOU, however (humèis dè)*, as opposed to the scribes. Those destined to become

His official spokesmen would certainly feel the allure of this temptation, and even His followers with less spectacular gifts would be just as drawn to seek those gifts that led to the titles and honors too (I Cor. 12-14). This enticement would have been keenly felt by Jewish elders or those few doctors of the Law who became Christians, as they might not wish to discard the titles and the authority they previously knew. (Contrast Phil. 3:4-11.) Nevertheless, most disciples feel tempted to confer such honors and titles on others, particularly their own deeply respected teachers (cf. 23:9f.). This looks to the time when Jesus would be gone, as it would have been less likely for the disciples to call themselves "Rabbi" while the Master Himself was yet on earth with them.

But how could the disciples stop others from calling him *Rabbi*? The point is more probably the condemnation of expecting deference or demanding to be addressed this way.

Jesus gives two reasons for this injunction:

1. *One is your teacher.*

- a. Anyone who has sensed the high holiness and divine origin of Jesus Christ cannot help but sense the chasmic distance that separates Him from every other human teacher, however holy or wise they may be. He is the final Word of God; they are but men "to whom the word of God came," not its originators. (Cf. John 10:35f.) He is the absolutely perfect Revealer; they are but relatively imperfect expounders. His Word is God's—infalible, authoritative, unmediated; theirs is a human interpretation, more or less correct, but possessing no more authority than the persuasion it carries in the mind of others as approximating the true sense of His word. Feel the majesty of Jesus' deity as He widens the distance between Himself and every other human teacher, by claiming to be our only teacher, without the slightest embarrassment or apology (23:10; John 13:13).
- b. Avant-garde theologians and proud scholars must submit to this dictum as surely and as humbly as their less erudite brethren. In the absolute sense we must have only ONE THEOLOGIAN, Jesus Christ! In the academic world of Biblical and theological studies there will always be Christians with an intellectual grasp of the overall plan of God, broader than that of their brethren, or with specialized information in certain spheres of Christian knowledge of which others are uninformed. Scholarship per se is not in question here. Otherwise, there could be no distinctly

Christian scribes (13:52; 23:34) who love God with all their mind (22:37) and no Christian teachers (28:19; Eph. 4:11; I Cor. 12:29; II Tim. 1:11; 2:2; Acts 13:1). But these latter must be people who never cease to be DISCIPLES of Jesus who aim to clarify and correctly apply the message of our *one teacher*.

- c. Where, then, does the Apostolic ministry enter in? Are these not our official teachers to reveal the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2:6-16)? Indeed, there is no discipleship, not faithfulness to Jesus, that does not humbly submit to and faithfully continue in the Apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42; Gal. 4:14; I Thess. 2:13). To receive Jesus' authorized messengers is to receive the Lord Himself (Matt. 10:40; John 13:20; Luke 10:16). However, to welcome the Apostles is only possible by believing and responding positively to their Spirit-given message; to do otherwise is to reject them, and, consequently, Jesus who sent them. This explains why "the apostles' doctrine" is not really or merely theirs, but is "the gospel of Christ, the doctrine of Christ" (Gal. 1:6-11; II Cor. 4:5-7).
- d. How well Matthew himself learned this lesson of Jesus' unique lordship! Although other Evangelists correctly refer to Jesus as *rabbi* (cf. Mark 9:5; 10:51; 11:21; John 1:38, 49; 3:2; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8; 20:16), Matthew uses *kùrie*, "Lord" (Matt. 17:4 where Luke uses *epistàta*, "Master, Teacher, Doctor," Luke 9:33; cf. Matt. 20:33 = Luke 18:41, but Mark uses *rabbouni*. None of John's uses are parallel to Matthew.). Although these words may be considered synonymous, Matthew's constant substitution of "Lord" for "rabbi" or "teacher" in the mouth of disciples, evidences an intention to teach that Jesus is no mere teacher in the standard Jewish sense of the word. Rather, He is the LORD of His disciples. The only disciple to use "rabbi," in *Matthew's Gospel*, is Judas Iscariot (Matt. 26:25, 49)!

## 2. All ye are brethren.

- a. In this context, *brethren* implies a certain equality under the one Teacher. The uncomplicated simplicity of Christ's Kingdom must not be spoiled by titles that mistakenly repeat the same aggressive awareness of rank and status that characterizes the very worldly society Jesus came to transform. Not only does titling certain brethren foster pride and a feeling of earned importance among those who are thus distinguished, but it also spawns jealousy and a sensation of lesser worth in those who

do not. This splits God's family into two categories: the worthy and the less worthy. It restructures God's community along old pagan lines; violating the nature of Christ's body (I Cor. 12; Rom. 12:3-8).

b. Alford (228) commented:

*Brethren:* all substantially equal—none by office or precedence nearer to God than another; none standing between his brother and God. "And the duty of all Christian teachers is to bring their hearers to the confession of the Samaritans in John 4:42."

Splendid! However, even in the family from which this rich metaphor is taken, there are older and younger brothers whose judgment, information and experience differ from that of the others. Elders and deacons must still be qualified, teachers must still do their homework. Jesus is not sentencing the brilliant minds among His followers to plodding along a dull plateau of development or trudging along at the pace set by slower students of the Word. Nor is He damning the intellectual curiosity of the conscientious researcher. Rather, He is saying, "No matter how much information you may acquire, your degrees and scholastic attainments do not lift you above your responsibility to be a BROTHER to all your brethren." He also devastates that bumptiousness and pride in personal achievements and worldly recognition that crows, "We scholars . . .," "Leading scholars teach that . . .," or "The most advanced scholarships has proven that . . .," especially where the state of the questions involved is quite unsettled.

c. So, how SHOULD Christians relate to their professors, teachers and preachers who are their psychological authority figures in the Kingdom? Distinguishing titles can be dropped without any loss, first and especially because, if these teachers intend to help people mature, they must be humble enough to see themselves as members of the larger family of God, not superior to it nor to its several members, including their own students. Second, because even the best of these titles smack of partiality, they may be dropped. Even to call one professor or preacher, "Brother Fowler," while at the same time first-naming everyone else outside the professional chair or pulpit, immediately implies that, while everyone is theoretically equally a "brother in Christ," some

brothers are more equal than others, merely because of their expertise, experience or erudition!

This insidious partiality forces all of us to walk a tightrope between our "respect for those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, . . . esteem them very highly in love because of their work" (I Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:7, 17), while, contemporaneously, not addressing them by ecclesiastical titles like "rabbi . . . father . . . master" (Matt. 23:8-10).

Jesus could have argued: "Do not be called Rabbi, because one is your teacher and you are all simply disciples," which would have shown that no one, however erudite, can ever surpass our common Teacher and must always learn from Him as an humble disciple. Nevertheless, He chose here to insist upon that common bond of brotherhood and belonging to each other that renders these stratifying titles absurd by comparison. So as to lay even more stress on our sense of family, Jesus passed from naming us *brethren* to naming our *Father*:

**23:9 And call no man your father on the earth.** *Father*, here, cannot refer to one's own physical parent, since Jesus and the Apostles regularly spoke of this relationship positively, (15:4-6; 21:31; Luke 15:11-32; Heb. 12:7-11; Eph. 6:1-4, etc.). Rather, it is this precious association with our earthly fathers that Jesus uses to shape our initial concept of the heavenly Father (7:9ff.). **For one is your Father, even he who is in heaven.** The full criterion, by which our earthly parent is judged, is set by Him whose fatherhood furnishes the exalted standard of all fatherhood (Eph. 3:14f.). Others may be our human fathers, but only God is rightly "the Father of our spirits" (Heb. 12:7-10). From this standpoint, why would anyone WANT to venerate an ultimately disappointing human being, when he belongs to the family of *your heavenly Father*? Who needs a mediating priest—a "father," Jewish, Latin, Greek or Protestant,—when the King of the Universe is OUR FATHER?

Nevertheless, just as Jewish disciples tended to honor promised teachers of an earlier age as "the Fathers" because these giants were thought to have brought moral life to their spiritual children, begetting them, as it were, by their wise, life-giving doctrine (cf. *Aboth* 4:15; *Sirach* 44:1; 8:9, the prologue and chaps. 44:50), so Jesus' disciples, too, would be tempted to perpetuate whatever misguided and misleading views "the Fathers" had taught. (15:2, 12f.; cf. *Pirke Aboth*, "Sayings of the Fathers," a Pharisean treatise, and Roman

Catholic dependence upon Church Tradition as one source of its present doctrine. *Documents of The Second Vatican Council*, § 880-888.) No amount of ecumenical wishful thinking can eliminate the fact that, because the modern Roman Catholic faith upholds the pope as "the Holy Father," not merely as Peter's successor, but as the true and legitimate, universal father and moderator of the universal Church, we must object to these claims of authority that rightly belong to God alone.

Contrary to Catholic use of Paul's reference to himself as "father" of the Corinthian Christians (I Cor. 4:14f.) or his calling Timothy his "son in the faith" (I Tim. 1:2) or Peter's similar reference to Mark (I Peter 5:13), it should be noticed that these are *figurative* expressions, not the creation of an honorary title to be taken literally. In Paul's case, he had literally converted these people personally, and so was, in a figurative way, their "father," (cf. Phile. 10) just as he was the figurative "mother" of the Galatian Christians (Gal. 4:19). He was not making of this figurative relationship a badge of honor to exalt himself or even that they should exalt him above themselves. Rather, he urged that they remember this when tempted to exalt other ecclesiastical leaders who, by Catholic standards, should have been considered spiritual "father" (i.e. priests and popes) too. (See context of I Cor. 1-3.)

How should we understand the fact that both Stephen (Acts 7:2) and Paul (Acts 22:1) addressed Sanhedrin members as "fathers"? Does not this violate Jesus' express prohibition? Lenski (*Acts*, 899) answers: "'Brethren and Fathers' is thus not to be understood from the Christian and spiritual but from the national standpoint . . . any wrong them who are in authority are honored by him as fathers should be honored." Their form of address is respectful and conciliatory, spoken as one under the authority of these national leaders as a member of the Jewish nation. It was a cultural carry-over, rather than a spiritual judgment of the concilors' true fitness to lead the nation.

But this raises the question of our own cultural context: is it possible to "honor all men" (I Peter 2:17), especially where they deserve it because of particularly noble, worthwhile achievements, without resorting to some expression of this fact stated in a name or title? Various commentaries conceive it possible to use titles and grant honors where especially deserved, truthful

and modest. Further, even such titles as grandiose as "Rabbi" ("my great One") or "Pope" ("Father") have now become mere conventionalisms that denote the office without necessarily indicating respect and subservience on the part of the user. It would be less clear to modern hearers to speak of Mr. Karl Wojtyla rather than by his title, Pope John Paul II, and less clear to speak of a Jewish clergyman as Mr. Fishbein rather than as Rabbi Fishbein. Further, the user not only does not necessarily intend, but rather actually rejects, the original immodesty and presumption these titles originally communicated. Nevertheless, the continued wide-spread use of such titles, even though de-classed to common designations, is unfortunate, because it perpetuates that gray area of confusion among those who really, however wrongly, accept the full significance of the titles, as well as among those who, while rejecting the spiritual implications of those pretentious designations, yet need a conventional word to refer to those figures who demand the titles.

**23:10 Neither be ye called master.** Jesus says it both ways: "Do not call others by pompous ecclesiastical titles, nor demand that others address you by them!" *Master* (*kathegetés*) anciently referred to any teacher, guide or leader, and in modern Greek is simply "professor." The word does not refer to civil authorities nor to those who are "lord" or "master" of their slaves or servants concerning whom other instructions are given (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:7; I Peter 2:17f.; Eph. 6:5-9). *Master*, rather, bespeaks that high, authoritative religious sense that rightly describes Jesus Christ, hence must not be granted to His inferiors. In fact, it is but a short step from assuming grandiose titles to assuming the authority and basking in the power they imply. But "not lording it over those entrusted to you" (I Peter 5:1-4; II Cor. 1:24) gets forgotten by power-hungry, ladder-climbing wearers of titles, busy accrediting their own teachers, institutions and instruction.

After accepting acclaim as "the Son of David," which everyone knew meant "the Christ," Jesus asserts, *For one is your master, even the Christ*. In this context where He taught the high reverence to the ONE Father in heaven and now narrows earth's theologians to the ONE Christ, this can be nothing short of a claim to be the only authoritative Teacher in Christianity, the only One who, along with the Father, is to be considered worthy of praise and veneration by titles. (Cf. also 11:25-27; 15:17-20, 27; 17:5; 28:18.)

**You have one teacher . . . one Father who is in heaven . . . one master, the Christ.** There is no time when we can say, "On earth we have no teacher, father or master." His teaching office is never vacant, never needing vicars or a "living teaching authority" divinely inspired to communicate true doctrine. Jesus is ALWAYS our Teacher or Master for as long as God is our heavenly Father. We infer that He pictures these offices or functions as contemporaneous. So saying, Jesus taught three things:

1. He forever freed us from servile submission to arrogant officialdom attempting to rule God's people in the name of Christ, but in the spirit of the Devil! Our headquarters and our brains are not among men in any one city on earth. We are rightly independent of great assemblies that pass resolutions, approve doctrines and otherwise dictate faith and practice, and free from theological chairs that trifle with principles or doctor the faith.
2. By means of three prohibitions and three reasons in three consecutive verses, He insistently and firmly placed us in total dependence upon Him, claiming full mastery over our thoughts, emotions, conscience and will. So doing, He developed our initiative and sense of personal responsibility to know and to do God's will, quite independently of what others around us may do or think. Our very spiritual existence comes, not from some rabbi, earthly father or spiritual guide, but from God through Christ (I Cor. 1:30f.).
3. Jesus Christ is as much our Teacher and only Theologian while He is physically away, as God is always our Father, although He never came to earth. So, although our Headquarters are in heaven (Phil. 3:20f.; Col. 3:1ff.), He is able to rule, guard and feed us on earth as easily as our heavenly Father is able to beget, love and care for us from there. We need no human father-image or vicar of Jesus Christ, once we understand what we have in Him!

### The Standard of True Greatness

23:11 **But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.** (Study notes on 18:1-35, "the Lord's power structure"; 20:26f.; Mark 9:35; 10:43f.; Luke 9:48; 22:26.) Jesus' statement has the dual-toned ring of a promise and of an order, since commands in Hebrew are often stated in future indicative. (Cf. "You shall not kill!")

1. Command: "Let him who is truly a servant be nominated to the high posts of importance and honor in the Church. Only such are qualified."
2. Promise: "Only the disciple who humbly serves others shall be considered greatest among Christians and rank highest in God's favor."

Here is the key to solving the dilemma as to how to react to our authority figures: no one is truly great among Christians who is unwilling to be the servant of all, the humblest, most unassuming, most unpretentious of all. The truly great wear only one title: *servant*, because their one business in life is that of stooping to lift everyone up to God (I Cor. 6:19f.).

The secret of balance is to be found in that high regard we must have for everyone else who does not happen to be our superior, teacher or authority figure. That is, if we raise our level of appreciation for every single person on the basis of their importance to God, be they Christian or not, and, if at the same time, we reverence in our hearts Christ as Lord, we will probably not fall into that servile obsequiousness toward certain authority figures that Jesus here disapproves. Rather, our adoration of a perfect Lord and Master should liberate us from getting overexcited about even the best of human teachers, fraught as they are with all-too-human weaknesses. Our sensitive concern for the weakest, the wobbliest, the less-than-lovely people, that seeks to elevate them to the level of kings and queens whom we may serve "as unto Christ," will not only make new men and women out of them as they respond to this unexpected, new kind of love. It will also transform us to the point that we recognize our authority figures to be of only relative importance anyway. We begin to see them as useful to us only as they, by example and teaching, show us how to perform our Christian ministry.

In short, if our teacher does not measure up to the standard of servanthood, he is not worthy of the title, and no granting him the title will substitute for measuring up! If he measures up, he will be the first to teach us not to tack the title on him. Either way, the title is superfluous.

### The Fall of the Pharisee

**23:12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted. (Cf. 18:4; Luke**

14:11; 18:14. An ancient principle: Prov. 11:2; 15:33; 16:18; 18:12; 22:4; 29:23; Isa. 66:2; Dan. 4:30-37.) Even while announcing the ruin of proud, self-exalting, presumptuous people, Jesus still does not crush out our desire to advance by bold and active enterprise and initiative. Rather, He redirects our aggressive energies into useful channels where our ambition can do some real good. Anyone who really cares about God's approval and promises of exaltation will humble himself by putting himself at the service of everyone (Phil. 2:3-8; John 13:1-7). James (4:6, 10) unblushingly promotes exaltation by God as a valid motivation for humbling ourselves. (Cf. I Peter 5:5, 6.)  
Who will be the humbling and who the exalting?

1. MEN? Even in this world, unbelievers and Christians alike sooner or later recognize that true greatness which is rightly the possession of those wise individuals whose service to mankind is born of real, unstinting concern for others. We also tend to distrust and deflate those self-important people who consider themselves "God's elder brother." If we share the mind of Christ, we must resist the pretentiousness and arrogance of pushy church members who "love the pre-eminence" (III John 9), steam-rolling others while promoting their own pet programs or views. (I Cor. 3:21; 14:38; II Cor. 10-13; Gal. 2:4f.; 4:17; 5:9f.; Eph. 5:3-12; Phil. 2:21; 3:2, 18; Col. 2:8, 16ff.; I Tim. 6:3-5; II Tim. 2:15-18; 3:1-9, 12f.; Tit. 1:10-16; 3:9-11.) Similarly, Christians are exhorted to honor those unassuming leaders, among them who labor in humble, useful service on Christ's behalf, not abusing their position, but quietly, loyally working (I Cor. 16:15-18; I Tim. 5:17ff.; Rom. 16:1f.; Heb. 13:7, 17).

## 2. GOD!

- a. Even before the final Judgment, God breaks the pride of Pharaoh (Exod. 4-14), Sennacherib (Isa. 36, 37), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4; Jer. 50:17f.; 51:34), Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:20-24) and numerous lesser dignitaries (Mal. 2:1-9). Even non-Biblical Jewish thought, undoubtedly based on divine revelations, grasped this. (Cf. Sirach 1:28ff.) God can exalt or debase men in this life as well as in the next!
- b. Final judgment, with its exaltation to eternal glory or its humiliation and dishonor, is His prerogative (I Cor. 4:5; John 5:44; II Cor. 10:18; 5:9f.). Our judgment is relative and fallible, while His never fails to hand down the perfect verdict. Honest self-humiliation on its knees, with open-eyed wonder will have the

happy surprise of seeing the Almighty Creator and Ruler of the universe stoop to lift His servant (Isa. 57:15; Rom. 14:4). As one wise Christian put it, "The only degree worth the effort to attain it is the 'A.U.G. Degree,' i.e. approved unto God! (II Tim. 2:15)."

How radically Jesus overturns the pagan structures that prevail, not merely in worldly society, but also in so-called "Christian" institutions, conventions and congregations! Rather than automatically single out the Church's highest officials, the Lord hands the crown to those humble, often obscure, people who patiently minister in His name at whatever level they are needed and can function. Rather than becoming proud of achieving the highest levels of professional competence, these simply give themselves unselfishly in generous Christian ministry. Matthew Henry (V, 332) summarized it thus:

In this world the humble have the honor of being accepted with the holy God and respected by all wise and good men; of being qualified for, and often called out to, the most honorable services; for honor is like the shadow, which flees from those that pursue it, and grasp at it, but follows those that flee from it. However, in the other world, they that have humbled themselves in contrition for their sin in compliance with their God, and in condescension to their brethren, shall be exalted to inherit the throne of glory; shall not only be owned, but crowned, before angels and men.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What are phylacteries? In what does making them broad consist? What was the Pharisees' purpose for doing this?
2. What was the purpose of enlarging the borders of one's garments? What were these borders and why did the Pharisees enlarge them?
3. What was the chief place at feasts?
4. Where were the chief seats in the synagogues generally located?
5. What greetings addressed to religious leaders did Jesus condemn?
6. What reason does Jesus assign for not calling any given person "teacher"?
7. What reason does Jesus assign for not calling any man on earth "father"?
8. What Scriptures help determine whether He meant one's spiritual or physical father?

9. What reason did Jesus assign for calling no man "master"?
10. Show how the deity of Christ is revealed in this section?
11. According to Jesus, who is the greatest, or on what basis is true greatness determined?

#### TEXT: 23:13-15

13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter. [Some authorities insert here, or after verse 12, verse 14: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widow's houses, even while for a pretense, ye make long prayers: therefore ye shall receive greater condemnation." See Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47.]

15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves.

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Jesus affirms that the Pharisees somehow succeeded in shutting the kingdom of heaven against men, implying that the entrance was really blocked. If so, what personal responsibility would be that of anyone thus shut out? What guilt would they have, if any?
- b. Do you think it is right for God to permit men like the Pharisees to shut the kingdom of heaven against people? What great principles are involved here?
- c. If the Pharisees were really as bad as Jesus pictures them, how could their converts be "twice as much a child of hell" as their spiritual fathers? What does it mean to be twice as bad as a Pharisee?
- d. Why do you think that the Pharisees produced such evil fruit through their ministry? What is there in the essence of Pharisaism that must produce this kind of fruit every time, even if the Pharisees themselves may deplore it?
- e. Is it wrong therefore to try to win people to our understanding of God's truth, and to persuade them to abandon their present position to come to that which we occupy? What is the difference between "evangelizing" and "proselyting"? Which do you do? Can we do both?

- f. What is a sect? When does one become a sectarian? Is the group with which you are connected, where you feel at home as a believer, a sect?
- g. What type of converts are we making? What must be our method, our plea, our goal, our spirit, if we would avoid the proselyting done by the Pharisees?
- h. To save ourselves from sectarian proselyting, must we leave to God's leading the question regarding which group a given convert belongs to, rather than claim him for our congregation or our segment of Christianity? What principles do you consider important in answering this question?

### PARAPHRASE

"But how terrible for you teachers of the Law and you Pharisees: every one a counterfeit! You lock the Kingdom of God in men's faces: you yourselves do not enter in; and you block the passage of those who want to get in! How terrible for you, theologians and purists, you imposters! You scour land and sea to make a single convert to your sect. When you succeed, you make him twice as fit for hell as yourselves!"

### SUMMARY

The sectarian theology of the Pharisees produced the doubly devastating effect of keeping everyone out of God's Kingdom: they themselves rejected Jesus' invitations to enter, and their opposition to Him cowed many others from doing so. Only membership in the Pharisean brotherhood counted, but this too ruined the earnest disciple because of what sectarianism does to his soul.

### NOTES

#### II. DENUNCIATION OF HYPOCRITICAL RELIGION

23:13 **But woe to you!** Before proceeding with comment, it should be noticed how truly Jesus' Woes picture false religion, profoundly contrasting with His Beatitudes that depict and recommend true religion:

TRUE RELIGION: *THE BEATITUDES*

1. The poor in spirit enjoy access to the kingdom of heaven. This humble submission admits its need of help. It is not confident of its rightness, but more certain of its wrongness and need.
2. They who mourn shall be comforted. This involves sensitivity to others' needs and pains and to one's own personal need to repent.
3. The meek inherit the earth: they surrender self-rule to God through their acquiescence and obedience.
4. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied with that for which they seek, because there can be no satisfaction with less than truth and godliness.
5. The merciful shall obtain mercy.
6. The pure in heart will see God. When there is no double-mindedness, no dual motives, God is pleased with sincerity.
7. Peacemakers are called sons of God.
8. To those who are persecuted for the sake of Jesus and righteousness will belong God's Kingdom, for so men persecuted the prophets before you. You are blessed, so rejoice and be glad.

FALSE RELIGION: *THE WOES*

1. To shut the kingdom of heaven, not entering or permitting others, is arrogantly to reject any suggestion of needing help. It is absolute certainty of one's rightness.
2. Crossing sea and land to make a single convert twice as bad as oneself involves a sectarian pride and an insensitive presumption. For this there is no hope of comfort, only punishment.
3. Evasion of responsibility to truth and duty is a subtle rebellion that quibbles to keep from obeying, the diametric opposite of meekness.
4. Tithing minutiae while neglecting justice, mercy and faith is but satisfaction with empty ritual. Instead of deep thirst for godliness, there is only satisfaction with trivia.
5. While cleansing the outside of eating utensils, the inside is filled by extortion and rapacity, the diametric opposite of kindness or mercy.
6. The white-washed tombs: externally righteous are inwardly full of hypocrisy and lawlessness, because of impure hearts.
7. The beautifiers of tombs were sons of murderers of God's witnesses with whom they warred.
8. (No woe stated) So from inheriting the long-awaited Kingdom, persecutors of Jesus' prophet wise men and scribes will face fearful blood guiltiness to be punished in their own generation.

Although the comparison between these blessings and woes must not be unduly pressed since the parallels are not strictly precise, it is clear that Jesus intended to express the antithesis of that sincere, heart-felt religion which he vividly described in the Beatitudes.

## Arrogance and Exclusiveness

23:13 **But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees.** Having publicly warned the crowds of their leaders' hypocrisy, He now addresses them directly. *Woe*: "How sad for you, because of the judgment threatening to overtake you!" (See notes on 11:21 and 18:7.) *Woe* stands in sharp

relief over against the sunny happiness of the Beatitudes, since it depicts unhappiness, misery and calamity. But, it might be objected, does not Jesus expose Himself to the same accusation He levels against the arrogant, exclusivist sectarians? Does not this very message fairly bristle with INTOLERANCE? But someone observed, "Nobody is wholly tolerant. The more one believes in tolerance, the less he can tolerate the intolerant!" Notably absent from these awful words, however, is any evidence of bitterness or resentment or rancor. In fact, our Lord is not haughtily cursing these sectarians, eloquently raining savage damnation on them. But neither are His assertions empty accusations. His unswerving denunciations are like calmly fired, deadly salvoes of righteous anger, aimed with absolute precision, an awesome moral bombardment that hits with telling force right on target, illuminating the entire battlefield when they explode. Nevertheless, through it all there is the sorrow of a loving heart. When the flame and the fury are over, only the broken heart is heard (23:37-39). Jesus' disapprobation here is, in effect, a sentence of eternal doom against which there can be no hope of appeal, except through sincere repentance. (Contrast Rom. 8:31-35.) So, these woes ring with the familiar trumpet-blast of prophetic denunciation. (Cf. Isa. 5:8-23; 10:1, 5; 23:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1; 45:9f.; Jer. 22:13; 23:1; Ezek. 13:3, 18; 34:2; Amos 6:1; Hab. 2:6-19.) Study Jesus' earlier use of *woe*: Luke 6:24-26; 11:52.

### SPECIAL STUDY: ON THE MAKING OF A HYPOCRITE

The usual definition of a hypocrite depicts him as a person who consciously pretends to be what he is not or better than he really is. This definition implies that he knows and understands the standard he imitates, even if he secretly rejects it on many points. But this common definition is inadequate, because it refers only to that deceiver who is fully aware that under an elaborate mask of godliness, he hides a heart ruled by godless desires. Unquestionably, there was much of this sort of pretense among the Pharisees and scribes, but is this all Jesus meant?

No less than five times Jesus referred to these hypocrites as "blind guides" and "blind fools" (23:16-26). Blindness, however, denotes an inability to see and connotes the inability to comprehend. How, then, can hypocrites be correctly described as "blind," if by the previous definition they comprehend the standard perfectly? It is because, in Jesus' concept, there are TWO KINDS OF HYPOCRITE:

1. Those common frauds who see and understand the disconnection of their inner motivations from their outward conduct, and accept it. These conscious deceivers pose as good men outwardly, even though, inwardly, they do not share the motives for goodness that stir really good men to action, because these hypocrites' mainspring is self-interest. Our experiences with these frauds leads to the common definition mentioned above.
2. Jesus clearly sees a second type of hypocrite: those who neither see nor accept the fact that they are involved in bad actions that contradict their good principles. Marshall (*Challenge of NT Ethics*, 60) explains this brand of hypocrisy so typical of the scribes and Pharisees:

The trouble with them was that they sincerely thought that they were good men who were championing the cause of true religion, while all the time they failed to see that their goodness was largely counterfeit as well as lamentably deficient, and that what they regarded as the essentials of true religion were not its essentials at all. . . . Moral and spiritual blindness was their chief defect, though all the time they fondly supposed that nobody could see so clearly as they did. . . . The Pharisee was as self-righteous in his innermost thinking as in his outward demeanor, so that there was no contrast between his inner and his outer self. He honestly thought of himself a model of piety and virtue. Their main fault was that they were *blind to their actual state*, so that a hypocrite in the Gospel sense of the term is rather "one who is firmly convinced that he is pious and virtuous but is blind to his actual condition."

But how did this binding process get started?

All of us, even the most gifted and fortunate, are born with limitations, handicaps, disadvantages, shortages and problems, in comparison with those who do not share our specific hindrances or weaknesses. Everyone else seems to be bigger and better and to have more of everything than we do. So we reject ourselves as we are and begin immediately to compensate for our shortages by imitating others' strong points—whatever it costs. We accept what others have or are, because this seems better than anything we have or are, so we struggle to catch up in various ways.

Even in religion there is no escaping this contrast and its resultant struggle. There is no relief in a perfectionist religion of endless rules

that holds before us an unreachable ideal, but which, all the while, lashes us to meet its standards. We must hate ourselves as we are, so we thrash on desperately to achieve our goal of perfection, but without the psychological satisfaction of success. Apparently others are succeeding at our religion, otherwise they would have given it all up long ago. But, why are we not as imminently pious as they seem to be? Perhaps we should "fake it until we make it." The more the frustrated believer fails to measure up to the piety perceived in others, the more he must hate himself for his inability to live up to what he perceives as God's will for his life. But, because he just cannot keep up with everything, the social pressure of his religious community pushes him to be selective. He is thus prodded into deciding which precepts to practice and which to ignore or postpone. So, to quiet potential criticism for appearing not to measure up, he lays greater stress on the precepts that enjoy a high visibility, the externals. He dare not admit his inward failure to others, for this admission would be his emotional and theological damnation, both in his own eyes and in the estimation of his co-religionists. So, this blinding process is spawned in a psychological need to justify oneself, to make oneself appear orthodox and godly, hence to compare favorably with one's peers.

This explains the high importance of grace and expiation in Christianity, as opposed to a perfectionist religion of legalism. (Grace existed first, of course, in true Old Testament religion, but the Pharisees and their spiritual ancestors buried it under tons of legal restrictions, traditions and the highly praised, but non-existent, "merits of the fathers" (cf. *Pirke Aboth*, 2:2), and left it no effective function in their sectarian system.) Grace and expiation mean that, through forgiveness, God makes us worthy in His beloved Son, quite apart from our ability to live perfectly. When we accept ourselves as we really are, i.e. by accepting the fact that we are not perfect, but sinners, and by confessing our sins, this new honesty clears the way for real change and new hope. We are no longer faking it with God. By accepting our actual state, i.e. dead spiritually, licentious, ill-tempered or whatever, now without any pretense we furnish God a solidly honest base from which to make us over. From that moment we not only see the logic of the method, but really feel motivated to make the changes necessary to become what we could not before. Self-acceptance, i.e. confession, is the threshold of transformation.

The hypocrite, then, is the person who cannot accept himself as he is, cannot confess his inadequacy and real sinfulness, because his

pride has backed him into a corner from which there can be no escape except by confession. This explains the phenomenal conversions of the publicans and prostitutes during the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. When they came along preaching repentance (confession of what one really is and expressing a readiness to abandon it for God's gracious forgiveness and a resultant new life-style), these sinners flocked in, because this message made perfect sense to them. Contrarily, the Pharisees could not respond correctly to John or Jesus, because they did not accept themselves for what they actually were—sinners damned without hope except that held out by a merciful God. They continued to judge themselves according to what they thought they ought to be or according to what they esteemed themselves to have already become, never according to what they really were. Hence, they never succeeded in admitting their true spiritual condition, and consequently never gave God a chance to save them. They refused to admit their difficulties, imperfections and temptations, and so they tranquilly, but fatally, assumed that everything was in order between themselves and God.

This also explains the hypocrites' insensitivity toward others. Because they cannot accept themselves as sinners in need of help, they have little sympathy for others. In the light of a graceless system of law, they see others as simply sinners who ought to exert more effort to be perfect and, since they apparently are not doing this, should be condemned.

In the teaching of Jesus, then, the hypocrite is not only or merely the person who poses as godly while perfectly aware of his ungodliness, but also the person who consciously and intentionally refuses to see some unwelcome aspect of the truth as it affects him personally. To this extent he permits himself to believe in self-deception. Ironically, however, this tool attacks the user, so to speak. Chosen primarily to cover up what he did not want to see, this self-deception later conceals from him what he truly desires to see, without his being aware of his loss. From this point on, this self-deceiver who has manipulated truth, can plunge placidly on into the most unthinkable error and the most vicious folly, while presuming himself to be acting with perfect correctness and orthodoxy. (Cf. John 9:39-41; Acts 26:9; 23:1.)

Peter and Barnabas at Antioch exemplify this latter type of hypocrisy precisely. (Gal. 2:11:21, esp. v. 13: *sunupekrithesan . . . hupokrisei*) Although both men unquestionably accepted Jesus Christ as their only Savior and Lord, yet, by withdrawing

table fellowship from the Gentiles in order to follow Jewish customs, they were unconsciously denying a fundamental tenet of Christianity: justification before God is based on the same faith shared by Gentiles, not upon practices originating in the Mosaic Law. They had not thought out the practical application of their own principles in relation to the Gentiles, hence in this practical test, they were found to be living in contradiction of their own principles. The inward principles of these otherwise good men were not in harmony with their external conduct. This is why Paul correctly describes their conduct as hypocrisy.

### Fanatic Sectarianism

23:13 **Woe . . . because ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter.** How could legalistic theologians *shut the kingdom of heaven against men*? Certainly not in the absolute sense, because the purposes of the Almighty God cannot be thwarted by a few obscurantists and bigots. Their success in doing this was only relative to their influence with others. There are not really two opposing views of the Kingdom involved here, i.e. that of the Jewish scholars and that of Jesus. Both, in fact, have in view "the rule of God proclaimed and acknowledged by the righteous." Rather, the dissimilarity lies in their opposing views as to what constitutes that righteousness which qualifies men for participating in the Kingdom and as to how this righteousness is to be achieved. *The kingdom of heaven*, for Jesus, is the rule of God proclaimed by John the Baptist and by Jesus Himself. This reign was to take more definite shape at Pentecost with the descent of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Church. But, even as Jesus was speaking, publicans and harlots, who ignored the Pharisees, were flocking in by preparing themselves to believe and obey anything God says. (21:28ff.; cf. Special Study; "The Kingdom of God," my Vol. III, 160ff.) In their own view, the scholars esteemed themselves amply qualified to enter the Kingdom, but according to Jesus' estimate, they stood as much outside its portals as anyone else they hindered. There is strident irony here, because the Pharisees' ideal was to render entrance into God's Kingdom possible! (See Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*, 15ff.) But, says Jesus, the practical result of your interpretations of God's Word

makes your own ideal impossible, so you keep people out of the Kingdom! How did this work? Several answers are possible!

1. By adhering to their ideal of righteousness based on perfectionist adherence to their own man-made system of minute rules, they taught that only in this fashion could anyone possibly know that they have fulfilled all that God requires of them. However, since God had not legislated such minutiae, the theologians had filled in the gaps in the Law of God with their own human conclusions elevated to the status of divine revelation. However, by binding men's consciences with an ever-growing list of rules to keep so as to be "perfect enough to merit God's approval," they made it harder than ever for anyone to be confident of ever being really qualified to enter the Kingdom. Thus, since no one could meet the Pharisean ideal, in practice no one could really enter into the Kingdom. Worse, discerning people, who could foresee this inevitable outcome, would be tempted to reject the whole procedure, only to find themselves without any viable alternative. For most Jews, law-keeping, to have any value, meant doing it according to the "authorized interpretations." But vast numbers of conscientious people could not always be as scrupulous about keeping all the minute, traditional regulations. The rabbis, then, treated these folk as "sinners, impious, ignorant"—outside the Kingdom, damned (cf. John 7:49). Even more ironic is the realization that, although the Pharisean ideal had theoretically been to make total righteousness possible for everyone, their approach actually rendered it absolutely unattainable for those who had any conscience, even within their own brotherhood: "*You enter not in yourselves!*" If perfect observance of God's Law be the only door into the Kingdom, then not even the best Pharisee could ever enter there! In their blindness they had not grasped this.
2. By their personal and collective rejection of John the Baptist who prepared the way that people might be ready to enter the Kingdom, they undoubtedly discouraged many who, otherwise, would have entered by taking advantage of all John offered the nation. (Study 21:23-32.) He demanded that they humble themselves and repent of their self-admiration and self-justifications (Matt. 3:7-10). This galled them. How could they deny themselves, abhor the luxury and condemn the life of ease which they put down as unshakable evidence that they had really earned God's approval upon their lifestyle?!

3. By their adamant opposition to Jesus who was really leading people into the Kingdom, they exerted an unhealthy influence over weaker souls less able to throw off their evil spell and follow Jesus. Because "the orthodox" determined to reject and oppose Jesus in every way possible, they swayed the unthinking and bullied the hesitant into a position of confused and undeciding neutrality. Thus, not only did they despise Jesus' invitations to enter the Kingdom on His terms, but they effectively cooled the enthusiasm of many others who might have accepted. (Cf. John 9:22, 33f.; 7:13, 45-52; 12:42; Luke 6:22.)
4. By their overt sectarian spirit they consciously implied that anyone who did not belong to their party was unfit for *the kingdom of heaven*. Were door-keeping duty their private privilege, only Pharisees could enter. With a mob of theologians and unbending sectarians barring the Kingdom's entrance, it is not surprising that anyone must use violence to elbow his way through these spiritual and sociological obstructions to get in! (See notes on 11:12 and Luke 16:16.)
5. Earlier, Jesus had condemned experts in the Law who had "taken away the key of knowledge" (Luke 11:52). The key that admitted entrance to God's Kingdom is a correct knowledge and true interpretation of the Scripture, because to interpret accurately the Old Testament's meaning leads men to recognize Him of whom the Scripture speaks and, through submission to Him who is the focal point of all Scripture, they truly unlock the entrance to God's Kingdom. Further, this correct understanding about the Messiah is the clue to grasping His purpose and planning and to seeing that obedient love, reverence for God and respect for people is the heart and center of the Messiah's message and meaning. Scribal pretentiousness and interference missed all this and confused or discouraged others who had succeeded in discerning this much. By teaching the trash of tradition instead of the true, simple meaning of Scripture, they effectively hid the correct intention of the Bible both from themselves and from others.

Consider, by contrast, what contributions these Bible scholars could have made to the success of Jesus' ministry by recognizing in the Old Testament prophets all the melodies of which Jesus of Nazareth is the fully developed symphony, and by pointing to Him in whom all the lines of the Law's righteous standard converge. Their voices might have furnished scholarly direction and convinced thousands to follow

John and Jesus right into the Kingdom. Instead, they glorified the Law for itself and built sepulchers for the prophets, expecting no Messiah in their own time, at least not like the Galilean from Nazareth! Thus, they locked men out of the Kingdom.

This woe properly begins the list, because even more terrible to persecute God's prophets is really to possess His Word personally, but to withhold it from God's people to whom it is given. Our Lord must attack the presumption in the Pharisean spirit that would jealously snatch the precious water of life from the world's parched lips, so that its personal rights to that cup never be put in doubt. Should Jesus say nothing about this attitude that considered sharing God's good news unconditionally with everyone to be an unthinkable blasphemy and each instance of God's merciful healing of unworthy people an intolerable theological embarrassment?

23:14 has apparently been inserted into Matthew's text by copyists from Mark 12:40 or Luke 20:47, since it is not found in the earliest, best manuscripts and since those who include it differ on where it should go in the text. (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 60)

Not only did they block the Kingdom. They also siphoned off members into their own sect:

### Partisan Missionary Zeal

23:15 Feel the bite of Jesus' satire: "You go all over the world to make converts, and what do you produce? One single proselyte. And what do you do with him once you get him? You make him twice as ready for hell as you are!" Although separatistic Judaism was not an explicitly missionary religion, the tireless zeal of the Pharisean vision of legal holiness not only possible but absolutely essential in all of life, naturally prodded its adherents to do everything possible to proclaim these views wherever in the known world a synagogue might be located. Did they seek proselytes from among Jews of other persuasions within Judaism, or converts to Pharisean Judaism from among the pagans? Apparently both. (Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XX,2; XIV,7,2; *Pirke Aboth*, 1:12; 2 Baruch 41:3f.; 42:5; cf. 1:4.) Their goal would not be reached by making former heathen merely Jews by circumcision, as important as this was, but by making them what, in their separatist vision, is "the true Israel of God," i.e. Pharisees, of course. Such evangelistic fervor is not at all alien to their character. While a few complacent ones may have crowed

like the Pharisee in Luke 18:11, glad to be among God's chosen few and above the common herd, the ardent zeal to make converts to their party is part and parcel of their sectarian spirit (Cf. *Ant.* XVIII, 3,5; *Wars*, II,7,10; *Life of Josephus*, 23,31.) But theirs was a "zeal without knowledge" (Rom. 10:2), because, although they were extremely incompetent to lead men to the truth, they were intensely eager to furnish that leadership, as Jesus explains next:

*Ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves* is a strong indictment, almost as if some narrow-minded bigot deliberately planned this result. However, the Lord is laying bare their results, not their purpose. (Cf. 7:15-20.) *A son of hell (Gehenna)* is a Semitism for which we would use simple adjectives like "hellish, diabolical, satanic, doomed and damned." (Cf. John 17:12.) They are the theological contrary of "sons of the Kingdom" (13:38). Any unbelievers among "the sons of the Kingdom" will be rigorously uprooted (8:12), because, in reality, they are sons of the devil (John 8:44). *Twofold more a son of hell than yourselves* contains a dual indictment:

1. "You Pharisees are children of hell yourselves!" Why so? Because their setting aside the sovereignty of God in practice, their ignoring His righteousness and their substituting their own self-righteousness is the evil genius and explanation of their system, and unquestionably constitutes rebellion against God (Rom. 10:3).
2. "Your converts are twice as bad as you are!" In what sense?
  - a. IN MATURITY. A new convert, because he has not yet learned all the good reasons why something cannot be done," is often supercharged with such enthusiasm for his new-found faith that he desires to learn and apply everything all at once. But, because the former pagan lacks broad grounding in God's Word, notions that seem important to him he turns into conclusions more extreme than those of his own teachers. Even sincere Bible college students today sometimes stretch the cautiously worded and carefully qualified positions of their professors, so that these teachers would be horrified to hear the doctrines attributed to them by their own students. This phenomenon does not result from their being taught this way, but because the immature, under less restraint from broader knowledge of the material, take their teachers' conclusions farther than these intended.
  - b. IN CHARACTER. The convert, whose zeal for the legalism of Pharisean Judaism leads him to master its principles, could

push its perfectionist methodology to fanatical extremes undreamed of by his teachers, then twist them back on his mentors with a vengeance. Witness the legalistic "ANTI" spirit among the movements to restore New Testament Christianity, that spawns sects pulsing with self-righteous contempt for anyone "not in fellowship" with their particular group. Although the Pharisean rabbi Gamaliel gives surprisingly moderate counsel concerning early Christian leaders (Acts 5:33ff.), his disciple, Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:3), persecuted them with raging fury (Acts 26:11).

- c. JUDICIALLY BEFORE GOD. By conscientiously accepting the punctilious legalism of his teachers, the Pharisean convert's own conscience leaves him no respite, no redemption, no mercy from God, hence doubly damned, first by his following false doctrine already condemned by God, and second, by following it into the hopelessly endless stairway to perfection which human weakness must forever pronounce impossible and fall back in despair, beaten by his own system, or else, obstinate to the end, he could claim the all-covering merits of Abraham to eliminate any slight imperfection possibly remaining! (Other Jews, however, repudiated this doctrine. IV Ezra 7:102-115.).

The unusual severity of Jesus' language is explicable in light of His own mission. He too had crossed far more than sea and land to make believers and save men for truth and righteousness for eternity. Now, instead of finding assistance among the leaders of God's people, He finds the mission of His heart blocked in two directions: inquirers were both denied access to truth which could have saved them (23:13) and they were taught what was both false and fatal instead (23:15).

However, no more unfounded conclusion could be drawn than that Jesus somehow meant to declare evangelism either out of style or wrong-headed today. Why?

1. Because, although Pharisees held many false notions, their zeal for evangelism is itself commendable. Their unsparing labor shames, nay, damns the indifference of disciples of Christ, who, while believing the true Gospel, have neither the desire, the patience nor the determination required to labor assiduously to bring Christ's message of salvation to all the world! Jesus does not condemn Pharisean zeal itself, but its promoting doctrines that made men anything but godly. Zeal for righteousness is always timely and praiseworthy.

2. Because aggressive foreign evangelism across cultural lines is not merely commendable, but imperative, because it was ordered by the King of kings (28:18f.) God's people cannot sit at home and pray for world evangelism without raising up evangelists qualified to "travel over sea and land" to "make disciples of all nations." Christians who rest complacent in their inaction and excuses for not funding the projects necessary to accomplish this, will be startled at the Judgment, when Pharisees stand up and condemn them, because, even with their twisted view of truth, they at least "travelled over sea and land to make one proselyte," but the Christians would not walk across the street nor send a missionary around the world to share the gloriously true tidings of Jesus!
3. Because we may avoid the self-interested party spirit Jesus condemns, if we have the right goals, spirit and methods.
  - a. We must continually ask ourselves these questions: to what are we winning people? What kind of convert are we making? What kind of human being do people become as the result of our efforts? Do our converts become more godly, more fully human than before, or only partially so, or, worse, even less so than before?
  - b. For many, the only practical difference between "evangelizing" and "proselyting" depends on who is doing it. If someone leaves their sect, he is a dishonest renegade, proselyted by the enemy. But if he joins their sect, he is welcomed as an honest, open-minded convert, evangelized by "the true Church." By contrast, our real concern must be whether what we are doing brings men to Christ or to our party creed. Does it lead to consecration to God, or foster party loyalty? Does it proclaim the whole counsel of God, or our human opinions? Do others notably glorify God because of what we are doing (cf. 15:31), or do they tend to brag about us, our achievements and our group?
  - c. To lead someone from a partial understanding to a larger grasp of the truth of Scripture cannot be called proselyting in the sense Jesus disapproves. This is simply to teach this disciple to know and do "all that I have commanded you" (28:20).

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is the kingdom of heaven that the Pharisees shut against men?

2. In what sense did the Pharisees not enter into the kingdom?
3. Who would have entered the kingdom, were it not for the Pharisees' opposition?
4. How or when did the Pharisees refuse to allow those who would enter to go in?
5. What mental image does Jesus evoke by describing Pharisees as "compassing sea and land to make one proselyte"?
6. What is a proselyte? What kind of proselyte were the Pharisees making?
7. What effect did Pharisean doctrine have on their proselytes?
8. Define "a child of hell" as Jesus used this expression here.
9. Show how the fruits of Pharisaism demonstrated the falsity of their system.

### TEXT: 23:16-22

16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, that say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is debtor. 17 Ye fools and blind: for which is greater, the gold, or the temple that hath sanctified the gold? 18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gift that is upon it, he is a debtor. 19 Ye blind: for which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? 20 He therefore that sweareth by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. 21 And he that sweareth by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. 22 And he that sweareth by the heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What is the peculiar irony involved in Jesus' epithet addressed to the Pharisees: "blind guides"? If a person cannot see, then on what basis would he accept the task of being a guide?
- b. If Jesus Himself told men not to call others "fool" (5:22), by what right does He Himself violate that rule here, calling the Pharisees "blind fools" (v. 17)?
- c. What is the reason men give and receive oaths? What is an oath supposed to accomplish?
- d. What is the basis of the Pharisean distinctions pictured in this text?

- e. How did the Pharisean distinctions actually encourage perjury? Did they lend themselves to an evasion of responsibility for one's words? Do you think the Pharisees deliberately aimed to evade responsibility for certain promises or guarantees?
- f. Do you think Jesus really cares whether a person swore by the temple or the gold or the altar or the gift thereon, etc.? If you think not, then why did He go into such detail? By giving these detailed examples, is our Lord "out-Phariseeing the Pharisees" or is there some vital principle involved that requires that He use all these illustrations? If so, what is it?
- g. In light of Jesus' strong statements against swearing, given in the Sermon on the Mount, do you think He intends to encourage people to swear properly and responsibly in this text? Is there any contradiction between His two statements?
- h. Jesus used such epithets in this section, "blind guides" and "blind fools" and "blind men," that one is almost led to think He is underlining another sin beyond mistakes about oaths. Do you feel this? If so, what sin(s) or failure is Jesus uncovering by using these descriptive terms to address the Pharisees?
- i. The Pharisees invented subtle distinctions whereby it was possible for some to evade their moral responsibility to tell the truth. What words or expressions have you noticed that people today are using to avoid telling the truth?

### PARAPHRASE

"How terrible for you who would guide others, but are blind yourselves! You teach that if someone swears by the temple, his oath is not binding. But if someone mentions the gold of the temple in his oath, he is then obligated to keep his word. What stupidity not to comprehend! Which is of greater worth: the gold, or the very temple that gives the gold its sanctity as the basis of an oath? You also say that if someone swears by the altar, the oath does not count. But if he swears by the sacrifice that is there on the altar, he is duty-bound to keep his word. You lack moral comprehension! Which is more important: the sacrifice or the altar that gives the offering the only holiness it possesses? Therefore, the person who swears by the altar is, in reality, swearing both by it and by everything on it. Similarly, if a person swears by the temple, he is really swearing by it and by God who dwells therein as well. The person who swears by heaven

is really swearing by the very throne of God and by Him who is enthroned there!"

## SUMMARY

Using special wording to avoid responsibility for our promises and for the sanctity and truth of all else that we say, evidences our insensibility to God who really owns and controls everything by which we could possibly swear, and who will bring us to an accounting for all our words before His tribunal.

## NOTES

### NO SENSE OF AWE BEFORE GOD

#### 1. The Problem Stated

For fuller comments on oaths and swearing in general, see notes on 5:33-37, Vol. I, 288-295. The live issue that called for solutions and to which both Jesus and the Pharisees addressed themselves was reverence toward God. In general, both shared this fundamental vision, but the point at issue here is how it is to be expressed in the specific question of oaths. Both agreed that the point of giving and receiving oaths is to confirm to the hearer the credibility of some statement of the speaker, which could not otherwise be checked. This is done by adding a confirmatory declaration whereby the speaker calls upon God to witness the oath. (Cf. Heb. 6:16f.) It is assumed that the truthfulness of the affirmations is guaranteed by the speaker's respect for the greatness, power, justice and high holiness of God. Further, if the statements thus confirmed are not true, then the swearer has thereby insulted the Almighty and must suffer the consequences. The value of an oath, then, depends on the true extent to which everyone involved holds God in awe. (Cf. Jer. 5:1f.)

Other peoples followed this same philosophy of oaths with the exception that they also swore by sacred objects to which they attributed a sanctity and authority which, if offended, could punish the perjurers. Hebrews, by contrast, were to swear only in the holy, terrible Name of the Lord (Deut. 6:13; 10:20). This intended to confirm their true fidelity to Jahweh and should have led to their fulfilling Israel's deepest reason for existence (Jer. 4:2; cf. Gen. 12:2f.; Isa. 65:16).

As evidenced by our paragraph (23:16-22), however, Jews of Jesus' time were not using God's Name in oaths, but were avoiding it by

substituting more or less stereotyped circumlocutions that served as paraphrases for the Divine Name, even in common speech. (Cf. "Kingdom of Heaven" as a practical synonym for "Kingdom of God" reflects this Jewish cultural attitude of veiling their reference to God without using His Name outright.) On the part of those who began this customary substitution, it was a supposedly pious, but really superstitious, device to avoid misusing God's Name. However, precisely because God Himself was not formally introduced into men's transactions by specific appeal to Him and His Name, reckless swearing by all manner of supposedly sacred objects abounded, corrupting public morality.

## 2. The Pharisean Scribes' Reaction to the Problem

Rather than attempt a radical correction of mistaken speech patterns sanctioned by deeply-rooted popular custom, rather than create hearts too honest to need an oath, these theologians limited themselves to the expedient of establishing artificial rules that governed the seriousness of an oath, arbitrarily deciding which of the paraphrases used in giving oaths really showed greater sincerity and seriousness, hence were binding, and which formulations were merely profane speech. So, even if ironical in light of their real results, it is completely credible that they were moved by good intentions. They concluded (vv. 16, 18) typically:

1. *by the temple, it is nothing; by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor;*
2. *by the altar, it is nothing; by the gift that is on it, he is a debtor.*

Bruce (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, 281f.) appears to have recovered the logic behind their distinctions: "The special form is more binding than the general. . . . Specializing indicated greater earnestness." That is, to swear by the very gold of the temple or by the very sacrifice on the altar supposedly shows greater attention to the sacred object than a loose, general reference, like to the temple or altar. This type of argumentation may not convince us, but apparently, in the ambient of the first century, it seemed quite persuasive to the Pharisean Jews.

## 3. Jesus' Critique of Their Solution

### a. Your Distinctions Reveal Your Lack of Comprehension

23:16 **Woe unto you, ye blind guides.** Of the Pharisean technicalities two views may be taken:

1. Born of good intentions, they were used deceptively. Undoubtedly some may have made use of these subtle distinctions to cover falsehood. In fact, if everyone knew about these hair-splitting definitions that separated binding from non-binding oaths, there could be no deception or evasion. But, if evasion of responsibility be the use made of these rules, then not everyone would have been in a position to learn these distinctions. In this case the users are exposed as hypocrites whose lofty pretensions do not hide their cunning readiness to utilize evasive techniques to break their obligation to the Law to keep their word where it interfered with their own plans or personal convenience. They were manipulating the Law's regulations to suit their own caprice.
2. Born of ignorance, they were nonetheless wicked. Because Jesus termed the framers of these distinctions *blind guides*, He implied that many could not discern the true, logical, but deadly, conclusions to which their subtleties led and that they were blind to the soul-destroying effects of their refinements. (See notes on 23:13, cf. also vv. 19, 26.) Although properly motivated by a zeal for righteousness, they who offered their conclusions as guidance for the ignorant, were themselves unseeing. They did not recognize that their principles were perverse, leading to more serious abuses of truth and greater dishonesty than the errors they supposedly eliminated. In practice, anyone who took their refinements seriously could lie and then make the most awe-inspiring vow, or make a most difficult promise under oath, without ever intending to keep it, all without any sense of wrong. Nonetheless the Pharisees appeared to be generally unaware of the unquestionably immoral conclusion to which their specious reasoning led. Later (23:17), He called them *blind fools*, because they lacked ordinary common sense to discern what should have been obvious to all.

Because the rationale behind their distinctions is empty of all logic and because their rules are deceptive, if not in intent at least in result, these so-called scholars, who could not fathom this, are doubly unqualified to teach God's people and are properly termed: *fools and blind*. He who has forbidden us to call others a fool (5:22), possesses the authority so to order us and to judge the hearts of these *fools* (John 5:22), and we would be *blind fools* not to discern the difference between His royal judgeship and our position as disciples.

### b. An Oath Is An Oath

(You) say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing, but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. Barclay (*Matthew*, II,211, emphasis his) is right to affirm that "to the Jew an oath was absolutely binding, *so long as it was a binding oath.*" But this very limitation is its own condemnation. Regardless of which formula is used, the glaring admission on the surface of this Pharisean definition is that the person was actually swearing. Either way, whether *by the temple* or its *gold*, *by the altar* or its *sacrifice*, *by heaven* or *by God* Himself, THE MAN HAS SWORN, and he is bound by God to keep his oath (Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:1f.; Deut. 23:21ff.). Nevertheless, they had the effrontery to declare: *it is nothing*. In Jesus' view, it was bad enough that anyone should be led to suppose that truth may be divided into two categories: truth which counts if supported by an oath, and truth that is less significant and may legitimately be manipulated at will, if it lacks this support. This categorizing encourages people to suppose that no blame is to be attached to their telling falsehoods, if no oath is involved. But that this should continue with the connivance and active support of the representatives of God's Law must be a monstrously unthinkable thing and a gross transgression of the spirit of the Second Commandment (Exod. 20:7). So, any oath is a binding oath, unless repented of and atoned for (Lev. 5:4-13).

### c. God Is Omitted From Your System

**By the temple . . . by the gold . . . by the altar . . . by the gift . . . by heaven . . . by the throne.** Rather than believe, with Barclay (*Matthew*, II,323), that our Lord is here merely caricaturing Jewish legalistic methods by reducing them to the absurd, we may hold that He begins with a literal description of some of their conclusions in order to show the theological and logical fallacy involved in all the rest. Who can affirm that Jesus' contemporaries did not swear precisely as He affirms? They ignored the basic principle that an oath must be, as Matthew Henry (V, 336) put it, "an appeal to God, to His omniscience and justice; and to make this appeal to any creature is to put that creature in place of God"! By what justification, except moral blindness or unconfessed antagonism toward God, can man swear by anything but His Name?! Yet their every distinction had the effect of cutting God out of their sworn testimony and of blinding themselves to the interest God has in everything man says. In His place,

they called upon unliving things to be witness to their oaths, which could guarantee no truth and punish no perjury. But if any holiness belong to any of these mere things, it was only because of their association with God who is the final Cause of that holiness.

By multiplying the number of objects by which oaths were thought to be binding, the rabbis tended to make it more and more difficult to determine which oaths were valid, especially for the common man accustomed to the older, general oaths. The resultant tendency of the rabbinical decisions was to increase the possibilities for hypocritical, unintended affirmations without meaning and consequently the occasions for more deception. By driving men back to swearing by God alone (v. 21f.), Jesus aimed to re-establish reverent, God-fearing sincerity.

#### d. You Have Inverted All Values

**23:17 Which is greater, the gold, or the temple that hath sanctified the gold?** If the rabbis supposed that particular oaths are more binding than those sworn by the general category that includes the particular, Jesus' rhetorical question leads all to see that "the general includes and is more important than the particular" (Bruce, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 281f.). As a guarantee of an oath, *the gold* is meaningless, except as it covers that *temple* dedicated to the holy Name of God who dwells there. Only this connection gives *the gold* significance. Without connection with God, nothing is holy!

**23:18 The altar** in question is the only place of sacrifice in Judaism, located in the Jerusalem temple, and *the gift that is upon it*, then, is the sacrifice itself. Moses himself had already established the greater importance of the altar: ". . . the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches it will be holy" (Exod. 29:37). Although the altar was pre-eminently holy and the gift only secondarily so, yet both had meaning only as concrete expressions of respect for the God who ordered both. Thus, there was no way to remove from oaths serious awareness of and awe for God's omniscience and justice. Only God makes things holy.

This concept of the sacredness of associations the Pharisees, however, had turned upside down by overturning the comparative value of each item. Not only were these Pharisean refinements mistaken per se, but they were actually a diabolical distortion of the theory of oathtaking, since they asserted that the lesser was somehow more sacred than the greater which gave the lesser its meaning.

## 4. Jesus' Concluding Evaluation

23:20 He therefore that sweareth by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all the things thereon. 21 And he that sweareth by the temple, sweareth by it and by him that dwelleth therein. 22 and he that sweareth by the heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon. Notice how simple it is to move from saying, "*by heaven*" as a veiled, but reverent, reference to God without using His Name, to saying, "*by heaven*" as a sinful evasion. Anyone who uses this expression to avoid responsibility to God for his words obviously intends no reverence at all by his reluctance to name God. This explains why Jesus must show what is really involved in using this dodge. Verse 22 affects all the others retrospectively: if *heaven is the throne of God* (Isa. 66:1), whence He reigns over everything else in His universe, then nothing exists that does not come under the authority of that throne, and nothing exists, therefore, by which man may swear that does not ultimately bring God its Creator and Owner into the question! In the final analysis, therefore, whether one swears by one created object or another is actually immaterial, since everything was created by God and belongs to Him. There is no way to exclude Him or His witness to man's sincerity. Conversely, to swear by anything, without intending to call God to witness one's integrity, is doubly wicked, because it misrepresents the meaning of oaths (a conscious appeal to deity to confirm our words and punish us if false) and because it ignores God's ownership of everything on which an oath could be based.

23:21 **the temple and him that dwelleth therein.** To refer to God in this way is not to deny that the very heavens cannot contain God, but to affirm that, so long as the Old Testament institutions were in force, God manifested His glory in a cloud between the cherubim above the ark of the covenant (Exod. 25:22; Num. 7:89; I Kings 8:10f., 27; Ps. 80:1).

On what basis does Aflord (230) assert: "God did *not then* dwell in the Temple, nor had He done so since the Captivity"? On the basis of Jewish tradition that the presence of the visible glory of God ("the Shekinah") was one of the items not restored in the Second Temple? (Cf. 2 Macc. 2:4-8; Josephus, *Wars*, V, 5,5; 2 Baruch 6:7; 4 Ezra 10:48; Mishnah, Yoma 21:2; cf. 5:2.) But even if the ark of the covenant were thought irreplaceable and the Glory enthroned thereon did not return, what would

that prove about GOD'S REAL PRESENCE in the Temple or in Jerusalem? Again, to affirm that the Shekinah departed from the Temple is not absolutely identical to saying that God Himself departed. That He should withhold the VISIBLE evidence of His presence is neither impossible nor unthinkable, but, without God's express declaration of His absence, who can affirm that He withheld His divine presence altogether? Was He somehow absent from Israel BEFORE the Glory came down, either at Sinai or at the dedication of Solomon's Temple? And was this not merely a visible pledge of His presence, granted to a nation in its spiritual childhood until it could learn to live like Moses, "as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27)?

Jesus utilized present participles to describe God as dwelling in the Temple and as sitting on His throne (*Katoikoûnti*, v. 21; *katheméno*, v. 22). Now, if God was truly reigning in heaven when Jesus uttered these words, why should He be thought to have permanently abandoned the Temple centuries before? In fact, Jesus expressed both acts of God in identical language, i.e. with present participles.

### Honesty and Integrity

Besides reverence toward God, Jesus is strengthening people's sense of honor and love of truthfulness. He is not concerned with merely unmasking Pharisean trick language and definitions that disguise lies nor is He interested in which formula they use to cheat their neighbors. Our Lord is much more concerned by the devastation wrought by dishonesty both on the liar himself and on the fabric of relations in the human family.

1. The pious lie, couched in the language of a solemn oath, ruins the liar himself, because it undermines his own faith in the word of everyone else with whom he comes into contact. He cannot trust them, because he must suspect them of using untrustworthy language as does he.
2. The fabric of social relationships is based on trust, but the lie ruins it, since the discovery of the deception sows doubt and distrust, nurtures suspicion, weakens public confidence, incites to fear and encourages people to deceive others to free themselves from deception.
3. Man's responsibility always to be truthful is undermined by the

mistaken belief that any of his words do not count, unless supported by oaths, or by the belief that any oath, not stated in the special formula, might legitimately be broken.

So, Jesus would save all these liars from the practical, evil consequences of their own vicious, self-damaging system, by revealing the deep, theological significance of all their oaths whatever their specific formulation. Further, He would save them from their certain destiny (Rev. 21:8). Most of all, Jesus would create in His hearers a sense of belonging to the entire family and, especially, to the family of God. (Cf. Eph. 4:25.) Only a deep sense of respect for the high holiness of God and for the preciousness of every human being can keep a person from deceiving another by specious oaths and empty words that only seem to be meant. Although Jesus preached an unadorned sincerity too honest to need oaths for confirmation, should an oath become necessary and be given, there can be no caviling or equivocation. (5:33-37 on which see notes.)

### Criterion of False Religion

Any religion that encourages men on some technicality to side-step God-ordained duty to tell the truth, or permits them to cite the precise letter of the law to keep from obeying what the spirit of that law obviously requires, is a false religion. Any faith that by meaningless quibbles takes men's attention away from God, or that encourages trifling with truth and weakens men's sense of truthfulness and their fear of the Lord, is false.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is an oath? How does it work?
2. What had Jesus already taught about oaths and swearing? How does Jesus' teaching on oaths in this section compare with that given in the Sermon on the Mount on this subject?
3. What is the sin of which Jesus accuses the Pharisees in this section? Or is there more than one sin indicated?
4. What is the meaning of the Pharisean judgments: "he is debtor" and "it is nothing"? What were they meaning to accomplish by pronouncing these judgments?
5. What, according to Jesus, is the major principle that people must remember when swearing by the altar, by its sacrifices, by the temple, by heaven and by the throne?

6. What was the Pharisean doctrine on swearing by the temple, the altar, heaven and God's throne? How did Jesus expose the absurdity of their views?
7. Jesus called the Pharisees "blind guides." In what way were they (1) blind and (2) guides?

### TEXT: 23:23, 24

23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone. 24 Ye blind guides, that strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel!

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. If there are "weightier matters of the law," does not this make other matters in the same law less weighty? Was Jesus indifferent about these lesser matters? Can anyone give too much attention to little things? Explain what you mean.
- b. What is the greatest commandment? What is the second greatest? What makes them greater and more important than others? Do you think Jesus meant to ignore love as one of the weightier matters of the law? (Cf. Luke 11:42.)
- c. Are there big and little sins? Does Jesus' distinction between weightier and (by implication) less weighty matters of the law suggest that some sins could be less important than others?
- d. What is the criterion by which Jesus distinguishes "the weightier matters" from tithing mint, anise and cummin?
- e. People in Jesus' day gave exaggerated attention to little things while ignoring the great principles of justice, mercy and faith. Do you think it is possible for people in our day to do just the opposite, i.e. give great attention to great principles while ignoring items they would refer to as nonessential details, even though God ordered them?
- f. While it is true that Christians are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14), is there a sense in which we too operate under the principle of observing the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faith, without neglecting the other things required of us? If so, how would you illustrate this?

- g. What do you think is wrong with people who are very scrupulous about (relatively) less important rituals, and yet who readily justify greed, impurity, dishonesty, cruelty and other sins in which they are personally involved?
- h. Some brethren believe that this text is Jesus' last word on church finance, i.e. that tithing is hereby reinstated in the Christian system. Do you think they have correctly interpreted Jesus? If so, explain. If not, why not?

### PARAPHRASE

How terrible for you teachers of the Law and Pharisees, pretenders! You give God a tenth of your smallest garden spices like mint, aniseed and cummin, but you have neglected the most vital provisions of the Law, like justice, mercy and integrity! These are the things you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, you carefully strain everything for fear of drinking an unclean animal like a gnat, yet you do not notice that you are swallowing a camel whole!"

### SUMMARY

Hypocrites are people who, among other things, are scrupulous about trivialities, but grossly negligent about duties of highest and gravest importance.

### NOTES

#### Majoring In Minors

**23:23 Ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith.** (Cf. Luke 11:42.) Jesus' first vivacious illustration of rabbinical wrong emphasis is the preposterous snapshot of a squinting Pharisee, patiently counting one out of every ten parts of *mint, anise and cummin*, while long, dusty cobwebs gather on his practice of *justice, mercy and faith*.

Too much could be made, however, of the fact that the Law named only grain, grapes and olives to be tithed (Lev. 27:30ff.; Num. 18:24, 26; Deut. 14:22ff.; 26:12). Some affirm that the inclusion of *mint, anise and cummin* was an "illegitimately over-extending . . . of the law" (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 831). While the Talmud, too, pictures

tithing of herbs as a refinement of the rabbis (Bruce, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 282), hence apparently not originally intended by the Law nor practiced by earlier Jews closer to Moses, several points are to be noticed in its favor:

1. The Law did not list in detail ALL of its proper, potential applications, but necessarily limited itself to key illustrations, leaving all unresolved questions in the hands of the Judaic judiciary. (Cf. Deut. 1:9-18; 17:8-13; 19:17; 25:1; remember Paul's argument in I Cor. 9:9f.) On other occasions questions were resolved by prophets. (Cf. Zech. 7:1—8:23.) Even so, Deuteronomy 26:2 specifies: "first-fruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land," while Deuteronomy 26:12 mentions: "a tenth of all your produce," so to tithe garden spices would technically not over-extend the Law's actual precept. In fact, Jews closer to Moses than the Talmudists understood they must tithe not only grain, wine and oil, but also honey (II Chron. 31:5: "all that the fields produced"), "fruit of all the trees" (Neh. 10:35, 37, not merely olive oil).
2. Although Rabbinism typically and wrongly over-stretched the Law in many cases, is this what has actually occurred here? In Jesus' words there is no discernible criticism of the Pharisean choice to tithe garden herbs. He did not affirm, "*These*, that is, God's revealed tithing precepts (not human exaggerations added to them), *ye ought to have done*," but simply, "*These ye ought to have done . . .*," leaving *mint, anise and cummin* to be tithed along with grain, wine and oil.
3. The extraordinary meticulousness of Pharisees regarding their tithing is, in itself, commendable, because they had covenanted before God not to appropriate for personal use anything that rightly belonged to Him, however great or small it might be. If only more Christians would share this same conscientiousness and faithfulness in small things (Luke 16:10f.; 19:17).

No, Jesus' emphasis lies in another direction: You are *hypocrites, for ye tithe . . . and have left undone the weightier matters of the law*. That the Mosaic system had at its base great, overriding principles is well-documented both in the Law and by the Prophets (Deut. 10:12-22; Prov. 21:3; Isa. 1:16f.; Jer. 22:3; Zech. 7:9f.; Mic. 6:8 and the list of other text at 22:36 notes.) *The weightier matters of the law* are these grand principles that give purpose to its every part. *Justice to the oppressed, mercy* where strict justice cannot solve the problem

humanely, and *faith* in God as well as faithfulness to God in seeking conscientiously to apply His Word, are just some of the broad, foundational ethical rules upon which genuine holiness and true righteousness are grounded and on which every other item of specific legislation is based. Jesus had already mentioned love for God and man (Luke 11:42; Matt. 22:34-40). Here, too, He expects every disciple to judge every minor detail of everyday life according to this criterion: "Does what I am doing express *the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy and faith and the love of God?*" Man's choice, then, is not these *weightier matters* OR *tithing* and other minutiae, but the one AND the other, the one THROUGH the other.

In fact, to tithe one's goods under the Jewish system meant to act *justly* by giving back to God what is *justly* His (Lev. 27:30), to be used for the support of the Levitical priesthood (Num. 18:21) and for *mercy* to the poor (Deut. 14:28f.), in *faith* trusting God's system to be right. Or, to put it another way, Jewish tithing expressed one phase, even if minor, of *justice* (because done precisely like God required and because, regardless of one's income, tithing was uniformly just), of *mercy* (because it furnished the means to care for the needy), of *faith* (because God promised to make it possible to live on the remainder and prosper, so I will do it because I trust Him) and of the love of God (because He can be completely trusted to know what is best for me, whether I can perfectly understand and justify it or not). Jesus' complaint, then, is that, in their tithing, the Pharisees were merely going through the motions, for they *left the other undone*, that is, they were not tithing as an expression of the great principles of true religion, but quite irrespective of them.

It is simply not true, therefore, that a proper sense of proportion, so fundamental to an even-balanced Christian expression, requires us to believe that not all duties are equally important, or that to fail to discern which is important and which less so is to lack spiritual equilibrium. The Jews were right to think: "Be careful over a light precept as over a weighty" but they mistook the reason: "for thou knowest not the giving of the rewards of the precepts (i.e. how divine approval will be expressed concerning each one)" (Aboth 2:1). This equality of duties is a valid understanding, because the supposedly "light precepts," that appear less important, are actually the examples, the illustrations, the cases in point which express the so-called "heavy precepts."

The rabbinical error signalled here by Jesus was their gross partiality in matters of the Law. (Cf. Mal. 2:9.) They believed themselves free

to select which duty they would obey, despite God's expectation (Num. 15:39f.; Deut. 5:1, 32f.; 6:24f.; 8:1; 11:22; chap. 30) and Israel's own explicit promise to be obedient in all things. (Cf. Exod. 19:8; 24:3, 7; Josh. 24:24.) Anyone whose righteousness is expected to come from the Law (Deut. 6:25) must do everything it requires (Deut. 27:26 = Gal. 3:10; James 2:10).

Why do hypocrites of every age take hyper-zealousness for microscopic regulations as the route to righteousness? The rationale is not hard to discover:

1. If it is a good name and fame for godliness he seeks, the hypocrite will even show burning zeal for easy-to-do, relatively insignificant rules to purchase the prestige of being religiously conscientious. In the same motion he can conveniently pay passing respect to God too. This is bargain-basement religion: two for the price of one!
2. It is easier to tithe (or pray in public or go to church or whatever) than it is to do those essential things that really matter to God, like having a deep passion for justice, kindness and true-heartedness. Consistent justice, patient mercy and unfailing integrity are expensive in terms of self-denial, energy and time, too expensive for the self-seeking person.
3. The bigot is hypocritical because he considers important only that which he personally can understand or what expresses the distinctives of this sect. Broad, fundamental principles like *justice, mercy, faith and the love of God*, are too nebulous for him, because they admit too many requirements than his limited understanding or sectarian tradition permits him to conceive.
4. The man of narrow interests, sympathies or outlook sees just a few inconsiderable articles of religion as big. Anything mind-stretching that would require him to think or reconsider the limitedness of his own worldview or concerns is positively painful to contemplate.

It is no accident, therefore, that, in order to lead us back to an equilibrated moral sanity, Jesus ordered: *These (weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy and faith), ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other (tithing of mint, anise and cummin) undone.* He expects both: herein is His true sense of balance. Unlike some modern religionists impatient with ceremonies and details, Jesus approves of conscientiousness toward principles and particulars. On the other hand, excessive attention to small details cannot atone

for neglect of large ones. Some disciples today are very strict about church attendance, but unconcerned about their life the rest of the time. Others are strict about identifying themselves by the terms set forth in the Bible, even about "restoring the New Testament Church and calling things by Bible names" (good ideals in themselves), but are strangely unconcerned about being what the terms signify. We must mistrust the misplaced seriousness of that religious zeal that burns itself out on trivial matters but has neither time nor energy remaining for the truly important things God prefers.

One sad irony is the use of this text (23:23) today by preachers seeking some divine fiscal bludgeon to nudge their members into giving God money. Ignoring the obvious address to Jews for whom tithing was obligatory by law under the Mosaic economy, these text doctors grasp at Jesus' words: *these ye ought to have done and NOT LEFT THE OTHER UNDONE,*" and miss two whole CHAPTERS of truly Christian motivations in II Corinthians 8 and 9. Like the Pharisees of old, these modern legalists fail to see there really are some higher Christian principles that are more truly motivating encouragements to give God money than the external compulsion of a tithing law. Perhaps a sadder irony is the Christian who neither tithes nor responds to God's grace, and just leaves everything undone.

### The Proverbial Clincher

**23:24 Ye blind guides, that strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel!** To clinch the point of His previous assertion Jesus moves His audience with another of His humorous sketches. In this one a Pharisee painstakingly strains a drowned gnat out of his drink lest he contaminate himself ceremonially by swallowing that almost visible, but unclean, insect (Lev. 11:20ff.), without even noticing an equally unclean camel (Lev. 11:4) in the same glass, and so he guzzles it right down! (Another facet of this exquisite portrayal is that there may have been a Jewish pun back of His choice of animals: a *gnat* is *kamla'* but a *camel* is *gamla'*; Marshall, *Challenge of NT Ethics*, 61). But the Lord is not merely poking fun at Pharisees. His point is serious: these sectarians laid great stress on inflexibly precise observance of minor regulations (*straining out the gnat*), but consistently ignored gross violations of justice, mercy and faith (*swallowing the camel*). Several illustrations of this twisted sense of duty occur:

1. They would pray long prayers pretending to be pious, but were especially clever at reducing unwary widows to poverty (Mark 12:40 = Luke 20:47).
2. They criticized Jesus' disciples for their unwashed hands (violation of tradition), but instructed people to ignore honor to aged parents (violation of God's Law) (Matt. 15:1-20).
3. Rather than be defiled, hence disqualified from participation in religious ceremonies, they refused to enter a Gentile's house, but hovered around outside, screaming for the judicial murder of an innocent Man (John 18:28—19:16).
4. Sadducean priests were not better to pay out blood money for the betrayal of an innocent Man, but then to quibble over a scruple against putting the same tainted money into the holy coffers (Matt. 26:14ff.; 27:4-10).

Their sin lay, not in straining out the gnat, but in swallowing down the camel. We too must give attention to important details. Faithfulness in small matters is a character index of trustworthiness for greater things (Luke 16:10ff.; 10:17; Matt. 25:21). If God did not order Christians to strain out gnats nor tithe garden herbs, but He did specify some other apparently minor detail, then He wants it done. We must scrupulously endeavor to do everything He asks.

### Criterion of False Religion

Any faith that permits its adherents to lose their sense of proportion and become carefully meticulous about religious trivia and trifles, while remaining indifferent to the things that really matter with God, is a false religion, regardless of its official name, origins or past history.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is involved in tithing? Where did people learn to do this? Why was tithing necessary?
2. What were the Pharisees doing when they tithed mint, anise and cummin?
3. What are "mint, anise and cummin" used for?
4. What, according to Jesus, are "the weightier matters of the law"? Define each one, showing how each deserves this high title.
5. What principle is involved in Jesus' maxim: "these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others"?

6. What did the gnat and the camel have in common in Jewish thinking?
7. Explain the comment about "straining out gnats and swallowing camels." What does the gnat refer to? What is the camel? What is meant by straining out the one and swallowing the other?
8. What attitude is shown by Jesus toward the less significant features of the Mosaic Law? How does this attitude harmonize with His other teachings about the Law?
9. To whom was Jesus speaking when He said, "This you ought to have done and not left the other undone"?

TEXT: 23:25-28

25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full from extortion and excess. 26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside thereof may become clean also.

27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Is Jesus merely displeased with the way Pharisees washed their dishes? What are the "cups and platters" which are full of extortion and excess? Are the dishes to be understood literally or figuratively? If literally, how can they be "full from extortion and excess"? If figuratively, what do they represent here? Is it likely that the Pharisees would ever wash merely the outside of a dish and not also the inside with the same scrupulousness?
- b. In washing dishes one must work at cleansing both the inside and the outside. In the moral realm, however, Jesus thinks that cleansing the inside will actually cleanse the outside too. How does this work?
- c. How did it happen that such good men, as the Pharisees outwardly appeared to be, could actually involve themselves in the vicious sins of extortion and excess, hypocrisy and iniquity of which Jesus accuses them here?

- d. Are you a member of "the true church of Christ" whose members adhere to the strictest rule of piety and profess loyalty to God and faithfulness to His law? If so, what is there to keep any member of your congregation from committing any one of the great sins Jesus exposes here? What practical steps are you taking to keep this from happening? Is your plan working?
- e. What are the things that truly contaminate or defile the modern Christian?
- f. Does it really matter to you if your life is corrupted by the uncleanness around you? Does purity of heart really matter to you? What, specifically, are you doing to purify your heart?

### PARAPHRASE

"How terrible for you, doctors of the Law and Pharisees, you fakes! You polish the outside of the cup and plate, but fill them with the plunder from your greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First polish the inside of the cup and plate, and the outside will be clean too. How terrible for you theologians and Pharisees, hypocrites! You resemble sepulchres covered with whitewash: on the outside they look fine, but on the inside they are full of dead men's bones and rotten stuff! You are just like that: from the outside you seem to others to be saintly people, but you have hearts brimful of pretense and lawlessness."

### SUMMARY

Behavior modification that does not involve the transformation of man's heart—his intellect, conscience, desires and will—must be declared a miserable failure. Mere external change leaves the greed and the self-indulgence that lies at the root of all moral anarchy.

### NOTES

#### Cleansing the Outside

**23:25 Woe unto you . . . for ye cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full from extortion and excess.** (Cf. Luke 11:39.) Jesus' language sparkles with brilliant satire as He sketches a line of Pharisees busily washing dishes with great ceremony and seriousness. Inexplicably, however, they are scrubbing

only *the outside of the cup and platter*. In Scene II we see these same sectarians loading their plates and cups with food obtained by their exploitation of others. From these they eat to excess.

Here again Jesus' caricature of Pharisean piety concerns obedience to a command of God that all Israel maintain ceremonial purity even to the extent of washing contaminated objects such as *cups and platters* (Lev. 11:32), a law rigorously respected and expanded by this party (Mark 7:4). From the standpoint of Pharisean theology, this section neatly connects with the preceding, because, along with punctilious tithing, scrupulous Levitical purity was one of the characteristic trademarks of the orthodox Pharisee. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, I,312.) Remember the water-pots at the Cana wedding feast, intended for purification (John 2:6). But that the Lord does not mean to criticize the way Pharisees washed their dishes is evident, because a PHARISEE, careful enough to scrub the outside, would surely be scrupulous to cleanse the inside too. But, by a surprising switch expressed by the contrast, *the outside . . . but within*, He draws attention to a stark contradiction in what the Pharisees themselves are doing. Although earnestly scrupulous with the meticulous cleaning of their dinner plates, they show no concern that these same dishes are re-polluted by the ill-gotten food and drink with which they are filled. Note His wording: *within they are full FROM extortion and excess (ex harpagês kai akrasias)*. He speaks, not merely of the contents of the plates, but also of the source of their content.

1. *Extortion (harpagês)* is the act of plundering, but, used of super-pious hypocrites like the Pharisees, Jesus may refer to the unfair use of their legal rights to extract wealth from others. For example, appearing to labor honestly, they used their inside knowledge of the Law and their contrived definitions to rob people. With cruel finesse they could deprive a widow of her living or property, and, by Jesus' account, often did (Mark 12:40 = Luke 20:47; cf. Isa. 10:1f.). Not unlikely the Pharisee could fully justify this rapaciousness to himself, arguing that foreclosure on a widow's mortgage was his just due. But, because of the heartlessness it involved, the Lord rules it *extortion!* (Cf. Exod. 22:22-27; Deut. 24:17f.; 15:7-11; 10:14-22; Prov. 15:25; 23:10f.; Jer. 7:6; 22:3.) It is not because they did not have the right, but because their sinful, unquenchable thirst for more (*pleonexia*, greed) betrayed itself in a ruthless, at least formally legal, exploitation of the weak. (Cf. Luke 16:14f.)

It is a fraudulent use of God's Law to utilize it to impoverish His people (I Tim. 1:8; cf. Lev. 25:25ff.; Deut. 15:1-11; 23:19f.; 24:6, 10-13)!

2. *Excess (akrasias, literally, lacking self-control, intemperate, incontinent)*. However, in what way does Jesus intend this accusation?
  - a. In the TAKING of what fills his bowls? If so, this Pharisee, normally a strait-laced bigot that holds everyone else to the letter of the law, indulges himself, taking liberties by bending the rules for his own convenience. He does not hold himself to the law.
  - b. Or in the USING of what fills his bowls? Undoubtedly, the self-indulgent Pharisee could rationalize any intemperance in meat or drink by asking, "Am I not to enjoy God's lavish reward for my righteousness? Should I not eat and drink to the full so as to do justice to His bounty?!"

Thus, it could be both, since in this case excess in taking unbridled liberties with the law and the property of others furnished the hypocrite with opportunity for further self-indulgence.

So, by their excessive attention to ritual purity (*cleansing the outside of the cup and platter*) these pretenders purchased a reputation for being saintly men with whom everyone could trust the safe-keeping of their soul and earthly property. But from behind this smoke-screen of apparent rigorousness, they struck their unsuspecting victims with the viciousness and venom of a rattlesnake. Whether or not the Pharisees intended this facade as a hunter's blind to conceal their true intentions and movements, this was virtually its function.

**23:26 Thou blind Pharisee:** see notes on 23:13. *Blind* to the iniquity in their own lives, they neither discerned it nor hated it. So, to unmask it to their face is to make possible their salvation. (Cf. Rev. 3:17ff.; Jer. 4:14; Ps. 51:2, 7, 10.) They were *blind* to Old Testament religion that taught heart purity as the only definitive condition whereby external cleansing had any validity. They were *blind* not to perceive that to fill their cup and platter with the loot from their extortion and intemperance rendered them UNCLEAN because SIN POLLUTES everything it touches more so than any Levitical contamination ever could! So, Jesus opens their eyes to the obvious solution: "Get to the source of your problem: clean up the inside first and the rest will be easy!"

Now, if the inside of the cup and the platter are rendered impure by what filled them, i.e. by the tainted contents obtained by oppressing

others, then the command, *cleanse first the inside*, must mean: (1) earn your food honestly, (2) eliminate those crooked methods, i.e. the plunder and license, that formerly furnished your food and drink. The only ethical way to remove the fruits of plunder is to return everything extorted to the victims. Zacchaeus understood this and applied Jesus' teaching correctly, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold" (Luke 19:8; cf. Exod. 22:1-15).

The foregoing interpretation takes Jesus' words more or less literally as referring to the spiritually proper approach to decontamination of literal eating vessels. But is Jesus merely interested in teaching Pharisees the truly godly way to wash their dishes, so they will be Levitically pure with the cleanness God intended in the Mosaic Law? If so, His point and its immediate application ends here.

On the other hand we may ask whether Jesus carries in His mind here the same concept He expressed earlier (Luke 11:39-41), where He discussed *tò éxōthen* and *tò ésōthen*, the outside and inside of the Pharisees' lives. There He referred to their hidden motives and their observable, external conduct, a point, incidentally, which He will underscore in His next illustrations (Matt. 23:27ff.). So it is not uncontextual to think of this meaning as underlying His thought even here (v. 26). There He said, "The inside of you is full of extortion and wickedness" (Luke 11:39: *tò dè èsōthen humôn gémei harpagês kai ponēriās*). They had not seen that "He who made the outside made the inside too" and were ordered to "give for alms those things which are within" with the result that "everything is clean for you." Thus, if Jesus is speaking in metaphors, the vessels stand for the human soul. The external cleansing, then, is the Pharisean attempt to change external behavior without getting at the true cause of all defilement, the sin deep in man's heart, whereby he corrupts everything he touches.

**Cleanse first the inside . . . that the outside thereof may become clean also**, means: Deal with a man's heart and those sins of the spirit that make him act the way he does! When his heart belongs to God by sanctification, whatever that man does or says will reflect his inner cleansing. (Ezek. 36:25-27; James 4:7f. pictures people of polluted hands [deeds] and impure hearts [mixed motives] as "double-minded." Such hypocrites have a public image and a private life that are in conflict. Cf. Titus 1:15f. Thus, total cleansing and unconditional submission to God is the only route back to sanity and freedom, to joy and true exaltation.) Get rid of your extortion and excess by a

truly godly repentance and holiness in your private life, and the external ceremonies of your religion will be properly observed as a matter of course. Jesus' solution (Luke 11:40f.) prescribed turning the greed that filled them into practical generosity to the poor, and to the surprise (*kai idou!*) of the new regenerated hearts, they would find everything truly pure for them, because a clean heart produces a clean life and pure actions. (See notes introductory to the Sermon on the Mount.

### Concealing the Inside

Again Jesus illustrates the concept taught in the preceding charge: the fallacy of scrupulous concern for externals that neglects a revolving inner character. Because He explained His own meaning, let Him be our Teacher:

23:27

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*

*for ye are like unto whited sepulchers which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*

23:28

*Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*

Men *whited sepulchers* for two reasons:

1. So they could be identified as tombs lest passersby defile themselves through unconcious contact with the dead (cf. Num. 19:11-16). In Luke 11:44 Jesus taught that men were defiled by touching an unmarked tomb, since there was nothing to warn people of its presence. Consequently, white-washing remedied this defect. Here (23:27f.), however, His point is different, because Pharisees, as *whited sepulchers*, would presumably warn others that the defilement of death and corruption is near. Further, no Pharisee would have believed that others' contact with his superior holiness could do anything but bless. Hence, he certainly would not have warned others to avoid him by "whitening the sepulcher."
2. So they would *appear outwardly beautiful* is the reason given here by the Lord for their white-washing (cf. 23:29). A beautified funerary monument can be a masterpiece. But this work of art, although it reflect the taste and skill of its builder, is *inwardly full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness*. The eye-pleasing

exterior beguiles the beholder into supposing the tomb's contents to be innocuous, rather, as lovely as its facade. Unhappily, this mistake leads as surely to his contamination as if the grave had never been marked and he stumbled onto it by accident.

*Outwardly . . . inwardly*: it is precisely this difference between a person's real character and his public reputation that distinguishes the hypocrite. This is true whether or not the hypocrite is fully aware of the dissimilarity. (See on 23:13, "blind guides.") Nevertheless, what a man is inwardly, what he does secretly, when he supposes himself most alone, this is what he is. Any distinction between this and what he wants others to know about him gauges the depth of his dissimulation. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 328) graphically sketched this fake:

A man may walk with bowed head, and reverent steps, and folded hands in the posture of humility, but all the time he may be looking down with cold contempt on those whom he regards as sinners; his very humility may be the pose of pride; and as he walks so humbly, he may be thinking with relish of the picture of piety which he presents to those who are watching him.

**Ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.** Even Josephus (*Ant.* XVII,2,4) documents their fraudulent faith: they "valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers, and made men believe they were highly favoured by God." Then he described how the Pharisees led some noble women on with deception, enticing them to do what was against their best interests. Undoubtedly, the Pharisean ideal was, as indeed our own must be, "the beauty of holiness." (Cf. Ps. 29:2; 96:9.) But their legalism, as also Christian legalism, produces this unvarying result: outwardly, the convert is cleaned up and freed from the crasser forms of paganism. By focusing his attention on trying to conform to a set of commonly accepted rules without the soul-transforming power of a new birth (John 3:10), he produces an impressive show of religiousness. By fulfilling the role expected of him by his ecclesiastical community, he *appears righteous* to his peers, notwithstanding the contradiction between his private reasons for keeping the rules and the public impression he makes on others. Luke (16:15) suggests that their external white-washing was not mere moral cosmetics, but immoral pride that justifies itself to convince others of its goodness. God, however, always discerns

the not-always-obvious difference. (Cf. I Sam. 16:7.) To appear *righteous before men* had been their goal so as to enjoy human approval, rather than that of God who sees and judges the darkest secrets of men's hearts. "And it will then be small comfort to . . . hypocrites, to remember how creditably and plausibly they went to hell, applauded by all their neighbors" (Matthew Henry, V, 339). So, despite the Pharisees' best intentions, their hypocritical character was itself a necessary, natural product of their system of social reform. By laying great stress on patient, punctilious performance of lesser precepts while (perhaps unconsciously) neglecting the love, justice, mercy and faith that really count with God, they created a dichotomy that corrupted their own hearts and others by real iniquity.

In strident contrast with Pharisean pretensions to be honored by others (23:6f.), Jesus explains why they should be avoided! Anyone in the company of a Pharisean rabbi, whose unimpeachable external conduct exuded an intensely religious atmosphere of earnest piety, would probably consider himself twice blessed, not realizing how defiling or how morally compromising such company really is. Although not every Pharisee deliberately concealed his true character from others, he nonetheless spread the moral contagion Jesus describes in this chapter, and no one suspected anything. No wonder Jesus alerted others to this danger!

### The Fundamental Principle Is Moral Purity

Other texts of Scripture, that speak of Christian purity and its defilement, point clearly to SIN IN THE HEART as the source of true contamination. (Cf. 5:8, 21f., 28f., 37, 44f.; 6:1, 3, 6, 18, 24, 33f.; 15:19.) Other texts underline the motive for everything we do. (Cf. I Tim. 1:5; Eph. 6:24; I Peter 1:22.) Others warn that desire for social approval can corrupt good morals. (I Cor. 15:33f.; James 4:4; John 5:44.) Other texts furnish incentive to remove all corruption, by describing the respective destiny of the corrupt and of the pure. (Cf. Rev. 21:7f., 27; 22:11-15.) So, the contradiction between inner and outer self-expression can be overcome, when the inner good character is the only true motive for our outward actions and attitudes, even if we are repeatedly anguished to see how often our practice falls short of our ideals. Moral consistency is obtainable, paradoxically, by confessing that we do not possess it, because in the confession we strip aside the veil that hides our inner self (James 5:16). Moral

purity can be had by being constantly aware that God, whose praise or blame counts with us, sees every discrepancy between motives and conduct, and by our living so as to have only one motive behind all that we do: to please Him (II Cor. 5:9-11, 14f.).

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What are the cups and plates which the Pharisees washed?
2. To what Mosaic law is reference made in the allusion to dish-washing?
3. Explain how the cups and plates could be "full from extortion and rapacity."
4. Explain what is meant by cleansing the inside of such vessels so that the outside would also be clean.
5. Explain the allusion to whitewashed tombs and tell why they furnished so apt an illustration of Pharisean character.
6. Explain how Pharisees' own hypocrisy is the necessary, natural product of their own system of social reform.
7. What other Biblical passages speak to the subject of uncleanness and purity in the life of Christians?

### TEXT: 29-36

29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, 30 and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31 Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets. 32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. 33 Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell? 34 Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: 35 that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think Jesus intends to condemn the Pharisees for "building the sepulchres of the prophets and garnishing the tombs of the

- righteous"? Should they have done that? If not, why not? If so, what spirit?
- b. Why is the confident affirmation of the Pharisees, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets," just another hypothesis contrary to fact?
  - c. What is so damning about the Pharisees' use of the expression "our fathers"? Jesus sees it as the basis for driving home His accusation.
  - d. Why do you think the ancient prophets, whose tombs these hypocrites beautified, were hated in their own day? Why were they honored by succeeding generations, who, according to Jesus, really shared the same attitude as those who killed them originally? Explain how this really exemplifies a typical characteristic of human nature, hence repeatable in our own times.
  - e. If, according to Jesus' argument, the Pharisees confessed themselves worthy heirs of the slayers of God's prophets, how can Jesus order them to "fill up, then, the measure of your fathers"? Is this not inciting them to further evil? Why would Jesus Christ saying anything so provocative? What could possibly be gained by this?
  - f. Jesus termed the Pharisees "serpents, offspring of vipers." Is this a nice way to talk to people one hopes to win to one's cause? Or did Jesus have any such hope now? Who had already used this language to describe this crowd?
  - g. How do you account for Jesus' vehement, judgmental language: "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell"? What does HE know about their final fate?
  - h. How does Jesus' promise to send Israel "prophets, wise men and scribes" become a tacit declaration of His deity?
  - i. Do you see Jesus' prediction that Israel would kill and crucify, scourge and persecute His messengers as a prophecy or as an astute observation about the probabilities? If He knew the Pharisees were persecuting Him, could He not have guessed, with considerable accuracy, that they would do much the same to His followers?
  - j. If Jesus found the "scribes" to be constantly opposing His teaching and mission, how could He justify sending "scribes" to Israel? What was the position of the scribe in ancient Jewish life? What modern term(s) would you use to paraphrase what Jesus meant? To what function in the New Testament Church is Jesus here referring?

- k. Jesus said, "Therefore I send you prophets, some of whom you will kill . . . that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth. . . ." What logical connection is there between the multiplied blood guiltiness for all the righteous ever slain and the mistreatment of Jesus' messengers? Is He sending these messengers for the *purpose* of increasing Israel's guilt? Or would this be but an undesired, however, inevitable, *result* of His sending them? Why does He begin by saying, "Therefore . . ."?
- l. Just how many righteous people murdered do you think Jesus meant in this reference to "all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah"?
- m. Do you not think it unjust of God to bring the guilt of the murders of all the righteous upon the Jewish people, since they had not personally committed them? Is Jesus ignoring the ancient law of personal accountability: "The soul that sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself"? (Cf. Ezek. 18; Deut. 24:16; Jer. 31:30.)
- n. Jesus refers to a "Zechariah, son of Barachiah, slain between the sanctuary and the altar." But the only Zechariah murdered in Biblical history is "son of Jehoida," not Barachiah. (Cf. II Chron. 24:20ff.) The only Zechariah "son of Barachiah" is the writing prophet about whose death nothing is known. Luke (11:51) omits the father's name altogether. Worse yet, Jesus accuses the Pharisees of having slain him ("whom you murdered . . ."). How do you deal with this problem?
- o. In what sense do you think Jesus meant the expression "this generation" in His warning, "All these things will come upon this generation"?
- p. Do you think some modern Christians are tempted to boast of the great, spiritual accomplishments of past spiritual giants, while at the same time cutting down their own contemporaries who teach the same message and manifest the same righteousness as the past heroes themselves? Explain. If you think people do this, what is wrong with them? What makes them do this?

### PARAPHRASE

"How terrible for you text doctors and sectarians, false faces! You erect funerary monuments for the prophets and embellish the

burial places of good men. Piously you assert, 'If WE had lived in our fathers' day and time, we would not have joined with them in killing the prophets.' So you do admit that you are sons of the very men who assassinated God's spokesmen! Now it is your turn: go ahead and finish what your fathers began! You poisonous snakes, hatched by murderous reptiles: how can you escape being condemned to hell? But take notice that I, on my part, am therefore going to send you prophets, sages and Biblical scholars. Some of these you will slay, even crucify. Some you will flog in your synagogues and hunt down from one town to another. In the plan of God this is so that you will become guilty of all those innocents whose blood has been shed on earth, beginning with the murder of innocent Abel and ending with the assassination of Zechariah, Barachiah's son, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. I can tell you for sure that all the punishment of this guilt will be borne by the generation now living!"

### SUMMARY

Men sanctimoniously boast of the monumental moral achievements of past spiritual giants, while cutting down their own contemporaries who preach the same truth and uphold the same standards as those ancient heroes. Such hypocrisy is punishable in hell. Nevertheless, such conduct would not deter Jesus from dispatching His messengers to save Israel, even though He clearly foresees their maltreatment. But just as clearly He announces the impending judgment to fall upon the generation then living as punishment for the guilt of slaughtering God's spokesmen.

### NOTES

#### A Rancorous and Persecuting Spirit, Guilty of Murdering God's Witnesses

**23:29 Woe unto you . . . for ye build the sepulchers of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous.** (Cf. Luke 11:47f.) How these words must have stung the shocked hearers! Israel owed so much to the ministry of its prophets and to the moral grandeur and fearless proclamation of men whose very lives reprov'd Israel's transgressions and called the nation back to God. The nation ostensibly wished to express its thanks by honoring these valiant spiritual warriors of God

by erecting monuments in their memory or by replacing ruder, previous structures with finer, more ornate ones. Such high tribute, by reflection, appeared to honor Him who sent them. For its promoters to hear Jesus define the seemingly laudible tomb projects as a gross lack of honesty or sincerity, could be no less than offensive. But our Lord nonetheless correctly terms it "hypocrisy," because, although they may be blind to the true significance of their deeds, their actions are quite out of harmony with their professed principles. Their two-facedness lies in claiming to be troubled by the assassination of God's messengers in the past, while they were even then scheming to snuff out a living Prophet who reproached them for their own darling sins. Because it morally costs them nothing (no need to repent or change), Jesus' contemporaries willingly pay their respects to the courageous prophets whose voice for God was not silenced by the angry bellowing of their contemporaries. Rather than honor those worthies by reproducing their godliness and submitting to their doctrine, these hypocrites erected monumental mausoleums only to perpetuate their memory, while crucifying those ancients' modern colleagues.

Note the association: *prophets and righteous men*. (Cf. 10:41; 13:17; study the use of "prophets and saints" in reference to God's people martyred for their testimony, in Revelation 11:18; 16:6; 18:20, 24). *Righteous men* belong right beside *the prophets*, because their lives testify to their recognition of the will of God and accuse the bad conscience of the wicked, as much as do the verbal testimonies of the prophets. Life, character and godly example all count! This explains why Jesus put this climactic woe last. It exposes the root problem that accounts for all the others. Israel's unconscionable indifference to God's men was tantamount to rebellion against Him to whom the godly were uncompromisingly faithful. (See notes on 10:40ff.; cf. Luke 10:16; John 12:44; 13:20; Acts 16:15; Gal. 4:14; I Thess. 2:13.) It was because the Traditionalist Theologians of Israel really cared little about honoring God that they could act as Jesus described in this entire chapter. Further, while other sins were bad enough, the sin of despising God's heralds, scoffing at His prophets and murdering innocent people who refuse to go along, recreates the same moral climate that led to the Babylonian captivity: "there was no remedy" (II Chron. 36:16) "and the Lord was not willing to forgive" (II Kings 24:3f.; cf. Jer. 15:1ff.). If it be thought hard to believe that God's people could so cruelly mistreat His prophets, consider the evidence. Constantly harrassed, Jeremiah was tried and

23:29, 30

barely acquitted, but poor Urijah fell victim to the sword of Jehoiakim (Jer. 26; cf. 32:1ff.; 36; 37:16ff.; 38). Amos was a *persona non grata* in Israel (Amos 7:10ff.). The uncompromising Micaiah was imprisoned by Ahab (I Kings 22:1-28). King Asa jailed Hanani (II Chron. 16:7ff.). Jesus will mention Zechariah's assassination (II Chron. 24:20ff.). Not the least are the countless rebellions against the great Moses (Exod. 14:11f.; 16:1-12; 17:1-7; 32:1ff.; Num. 11:1ff.; 12:1ff.; 14:1ff.; 16:1ff.; 20:2-13; 21:4ff.). Remember Stephen's charge against the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:52!

### A Nice Speech, but a Glaring Admission

23:30 and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Psychologically, they may well have persuaded themselves of their greater readiness to hear and obey the now-dead prophets. They could protest that these monuments intended to signal their definite, spiritual dissociation from their cruel ancestors who had brutalized the prophets. They could argue that their actions evidenced their approval of the prophets' pronouncements and their own conscientious decision to carry out what the prophets had preached and for which they were eliminated. Resentful, they could counter Jesus' indictment: "How can you charge us with hypocrisy in giving respect and recognition to the prophets, when, today we are really practicing what they preached? After all, we are not crude idolators; we worship the one, true God!" But in this profusion of devotion, Jesus discerns a glaring admission:

23:31 Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets. "The words that will convict you are your own and are sufficient to show you to be their true, spiritual heirs." In what ways did these sectarians inadvertently betray themselves?

1. They confessed without shame to being sons of the prophet-killers. Their highly revealing choice of language is hardly accidental. Their attitude was not that "our prophets" were killed by "the fathers," but *our fathers* killed *the prophets*. (Contrast Stephen's language: YOUR fathers," Acts 7:51f.).
2. Down under the veneer of high devotion, Jesus sees the same superficiality and ceremonialism, the same sinful attitudes characteristic of preceding ages. Complacently and gratuitously they

claim to be better men than their ancestors: Matthew Henry (V, 339f.) wrote:

The dectfulness of sinners' hearts appears very much in this, that . . . they fancy . . . that, if they had had other people's opportunities, they should have improved them more faithfully; if they had been in other people's temptations, they should have resisted them more vigorously; when yet they improve not the opportunities they have, nor resist the temptations they are in.

Their swaggering boast of greater piety, presumably evident in their properly entombing the prophets, betrays the same unjustified self-esteem their conceited fathers possessed. More appropriate than their self-praise would have been the contrite admission, "We have sinned, we and our fathers" (Alford, 232).

3. Further self-incriminating evidence lies in their confession that the men whose blood was shed were *the prophets*. On what reasonable basis could they justify their calling them "*prophets*"? Did they know it because these men of God had furnished the true prophetic signs as their credentials? (Deut. 18:15-22; 13:1-5; Isa. 8:19f.; I Kings 22:28; Jer. 26; etc.) And, precisely as their fathers had done when rejecting the true prophets in their day, the scribes and Pharisees did not utilize these same standards to test Jesus' claims honestly so as to recognize (or discredit) Him.
4. Because Jesus' contemporaries had not learned the lessons of their national, prophetic heritage, they would repeat its errors. In verse 34 Jesus will demonstrate just how truly these sons are typical of their fathers. They will repeat the dark history of their grandfathers almost literally. He had already predicted the harrassment of His disciples by those who "persecuted the prophets who were before you" (5:12), as if the persecutors of all ages belonged to but one monstrous class.
5. "You confess the guilt of your fathers? Then you know the standard against which they sinned! But if you pretend to condemn their sin, and yet permit yourselves to repeat it—and repeat it you will!—you testify against yourselves by proving your more excellent opportunity to know and do better, and consequently condemn yourselves for your greater inexcusability!" (Cf. Rom. 1:32—2:29.)

So, *If we had been . . . we would not have. . .*, is but a hypothesis contrary to fact, because even during this Last Week of Jesus' ministry

Israel's religious and political elite had been waging an all-out smear campaign to crush this Prophet whose spectacular credentials established His divine authority more concretely than all who had preceded Him (12:14; John 5:18; 7:1, 25, 30, 44; 8:59; 10:31, 39; 11:49-53). The treatment they accorded Jesus, their living Prophet, unerringly established what kind of treatment they would have accorded the martyred prophets, had they lived in their time.

Jesus' thorough refutation of their pretense to do homage to the prophets exposes an unfortunately typical human trait evident in their practice. They venerated the prophets merely because they were idealized, emptied of meaning and gone. While eulogizing them and turning their tombs into national shrines, by hating the prophets of their own day these hypocrites were motivated by the same spirit that goaded their fathers to murder. Why is this true?

1. They were unwilling to come to grips with truth that was new to them and unapproved by official consent.
2. Their traditional concepts, their selfish interests could not tolerate their contemporary prophet's forceful, pointed application of unwelcome truth to their personal immorality and to their own social evils.
3. They shared no deep yearning to know God's judgment on their personal lives. Their heart was not in harmony with God Himself. They were not open to anything He might say without their prior approval.
4. They did not realize why they, the successive generation, were really honoring their fallen prophets. Like their fathers, they did not fear the dead prophet. He no longer threatened their comfort or convenience by troubling their conscience with embarrassing truth and accusing questions. The dead prophet no longer confronts them like an accusing conscience, calling attention to THEIR corruption or prodding THEM to action. It simply costs far less morally to make a national hero of an unthreatening, dead prophet, than to have to live with and listen to a living one. (Study I Thess. 2:14b-16.)
5. They undervalued the witness that the ancient prophets had already given to Jesus as the Christ. Were they really sensitive to that testimony in its entirety, they would have seen in the program of the Galilean Prophet the marvelous fulfilment of God's testimony to His real identity.

HOW MAY WE EXTRICATE OURSELVES  
FROM THIS HYPOCRISY?

1. We must not be content merely to produce a wooden copy of the mannerisms, speech patterns, cultural distinctives and other superficial characteristics of God's great leaders of the past. We must savor their spirit and love the Spirit who made them what they are, following His leading in our time and life.
2. Nor must we try to remain statically rooted to the cultural distinctives of their era, as if these represented a superior holiness. We must faithfully preach their timeless message to living people in our own culture and in our own era.
3. We must embrace all that is true and unquestionably from God, regardless of who says it, whether we ever believed it before or not, whether our fathers ever heard of it or not. We must hold it fast, simply because we love the God who revealed it.
4. We show our true respect for God's prophets by our treatment of those who speak His messages to us today, not by the empty praise we express for those long-dead.

When God Gives Up On People

23:32 **Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.** This *measure*, according to one view, is the standard of wickedness set by *your fathers*. "Your forefathers have set a high mark in ungodliness and, with unreasoning consistency, you have accepted their misguided philosophy. Meet their mark!" This surprising challenge provokes this scolding reproof: "How can a person who claims to lead men to God provoke these bitter enemies to further brutality? What could He possibly hope to gain by egging them on to further evil?" Several rebuttals are possible:

1. His is a call to end their hypocrisy by dropping their mask of sham piety: "Act according to your true character for once, so people can see how truly you really are like your fathers!"
2. It is a revelation that He fully knows their dark plotting: "Get on with your bloody business! This is the week, this is the city and you are the men. Since I am your target, finish what your fathers began!" (Cf. John 13:27; Matt. 26:50 taken as a command.)

3. Jesus concedes them their will. *Fill ye up* (*plēròsate*, aorist imperative). Although imperative in form, His words do not necessarily order His enemies to act, because imperative verbs may sometimes express a concession. (See note on 19:12 and citation from Blass-Debrunner; cf. Hosea 4:17; Rev. 22:11.) "If you are firmly resolved to tread the path marked out by your fathers, go ahead, but do not complain that I did not warn you!" (Cf. John 2:19 also imperative.) Because these Jews did not like to retain the love, the knowledge, the honor and the messages of God in their hearts (John 5:23, 38, 41, 44; 8:42, 47; 12:43; 15:24f.; 16:3), Jesus gives them up to do what ought not to be done. (Study Rom. 1:24, 26, 28.) He openly recognizes their God-given freedom to act either to receive or reject Him, and concedes them the right to the latter option, however much it pains Him.
4. This is persuasive reverse psychology that powerfully pushes them to face the logical extremes of their insane plotting, before they actually carry it out. If pointed parables cannot awaken their seared conscience, perhaps blunt, plain-spoken exposure of the monstrosity of their planned sin would shake them. Thus, His love continues to work at their salvation, despite their determination to remain irreclaimable. To the tough He becomes tough, that by all means He might save some. (Cf. I Cor. 9:19-23.)

Another, more threatening interpretation may lie behind the words, "*Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.*" In this case, *the measure of your fathers* is a figurative, divine measuring vessel in the hand of God into which one generation after another pours the dreadful responsibility for its sinfulness. In fact, God is keeping score, whether people know and believe it or not. (Cf. Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 8:7.) When God deems it full to overflowing (cf. Gen. 15:16), He pours out judgment on the sinners. Jesus means, accordingly, "In the same manner your fathers filled their measure to overflowing and God poured out His wrath on them, you too might as well go ahead and fill the divine measure, and pay the moral consequences for your guilt!" This interpretation emphasizes their ripeness for judgment in contrast to God's limit for tolerating their sins. (Cf. Jer. 44:22; Rev. 14:17f.) Some might see *the measure of your fathers* as *the measure* begun by *your fathers*. In this case, each succeeding generation of wicked unbelievers adds to the final overflow by doing its part, hence Jesus challenges His generation to run the cup over, bringing divine wrath upon the nation that rejected God's mercy. He often

brings punishment of one generation upon the next. Whether He does so or not often depends upon whether or not the sons follow the wicked example of their parents (Ezek. 18). But where they do, He justly punishes the children for willingly repeating the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him (Deut. 5:9f.).

Notice how Jesus interwove His scathing denunciation of the Pharisees with concepts introduced earlier the same day. The bloody repudiation of the prophets here reflects the attitudes of the Tenant Farmers in the Vineyard (21:33-39).

23:33 *Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers*: by repeating nearly word-for-word John the Baptist's searing censure of these religious pretenders expressed years before this (3:7; cf. Luke 3:7), and His own verdict uttered in mid-ministry (12:34), Jesus forcefully reminds them what little effect all this prophetic preaching of repentance had produced in them. John had challenged their motives: "Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" Now, Jesus three and a half years later, convincingly closes all doors to escape, asking, "*How shall ye escape the judgment of hell?*"

**THEIR CHARACTER** explains the severity of His attack. They are *serpents, offspring of vipers*. (Cf. notes on 3:7.) Like those reptiles full of venom, they are poised to strike without warning. (Cf. Paul's unfigurative language that expressed approximately the same sense, (Acts 13:10). Not unlikely, Jesus' words also reveal their spiritual parentage. (Cf. John 8:44; I John 3:8-10.)

**THEIR CONDEMNATION**: *the judgment of hell*, i.e. the judgment that God pronounced that condemns them to suffer there. Jesus Christ does not hesitate to preach hell and damnation nor to point the way of escape therefrom nor to expose the character of those who just suffer there. However blistering Jesus' sentence may sound, it does not here expose the relative severity involved: "They shall receive the greater condemnation!" (Mark 12:40 = Luke 20:47). Not merely in hell, they face a greater degree of punishment there, because of their superior chance to know and to do God's will (Jer. 16:11f.; notes on 11:22, 24).

**THEIR QUANDARY**: *how shall we escape?* Given their present course and character, they could not. Although His question is formally rhetorical, the literal form of His question should cause at least some of the more meditative among them to reflect. "If God sees you in your present, hell-inspired role, can He welcome you? If not, what

plans are you making to avert His inexorable wrath?" But His deliberative question is really a rhetorical substitute for an assertion: "You shall not escape being consigned to Hell!" So long as they remain impenitent, their destiny is inflexibly decided.

The typically Pharisean response would be, "I shall escape the judgment of hell by virtue of my prayer and tithing, and where these do not suffice, by the merits of the fathers," as if ANY amount of human effort possessed sufficient merit to earn escape from punishment. This constitutes self-deception, because this very accumulation of religious pretenses proves that the hypocrite knew about our holy God, hence could have recognized his own imperfection because of its striking contrast to God's glorious righteousness, and so could have doubted the value of all his own human goodness, and finally surrendered all claim to his self-justifications and cast himself on the all-sufficient mercies of God.

### Murderers of Contemporary Prophets

**23:34 Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets.** (Cf. Luke 11:49-51.) *Behold:* watch for the unexpected in what I am about to say. Rather than deny you further light and opportunity on the grounds of what you have any normal right to expect, I will do the astonishingly unpredictable! *Therefore,* i.e. in light of your wilful, headlong plunge into self-destruction in hell because of your moral agreement with your fathers who assassinated the prophets, *I send unto you some more prophets!* What incredible mercy, patience and love!

1. The clearly foreseen, murderous project of these wicked men would not deter the Son of God from commissioning His heralds. The hatred and rejection that His people would confront are no good reason to abandon His plan to evangelize Israel and the world. To the very end Jesus is faithful minister to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (10:6, 23; 15:24; Acts 13:46), sending one servant after another (21:36) to harvest the fruits of righteousness in Israel, only to see them go down, mistreated and martyred one by one.
2. But our Lord is not simply furnishing more cannonfodder for the malice of His detractors. Rather, He is graciously redoubling His efforts to expose these killers to the LOVE OF GOD! Incredibly, the martyrs' merciful mission to unbelieving Judaism was to begin

at Jerusalem, the stronghold of these prophet-slayers (Luke 24:47f.; Acts 1:4, 8)!

*Behold, I send you prophets:* Who does He think He is anyway? Only the Lord God sends prophets (II Chron. 36:15f.; Neh. 9:26, 30; Deut. 18:15, 18; Amos 3:7)! Here the divine majesty of God's Son breaks through the veil of the earthly flesh of Jesus of Nazareth, revealing Him as the Sender of the prophets. Further, He kept His word. (John 20:21, Matt. 28:18f.; see notes on 5:12.) Earlier Jesus had promised, "I will send them prophets and apostles" (Luke 11:49f.), but here, *I send unto you prophets, wise men and scribes.* Following the death of the last genuine *prophets*, Israel's teachers had been uninspired sages and theologians, the *wise men and scribes*. So, the Kingdom of the Messiah is to be led by its *Nebhiim, Hakamim and Sopherim* too, as was God's Kingdom of Israel. In using this terminology to speak of Christian teachers, the Lord is not merely copying the Jewish economy to give His Church a pseudoclassic structure and an unearned prestige. Rather, by using this language, He achieved two purposes:

1. He indicated His intention to equip His people with Christian teachers and missionaries who would announce and expound God's will and wisdom. In contrast to the theologians of the old order, the new covenant scholars would be sent by and loyal to the Messiah, proclaiming His Gospel.
  - a. *Prophets*, as distinguished from the other offices, wrote or spoke God's message by direct inspiration or mandate. Among these are the Apostles and Spirit-led men like Stephen and Philip (Acts 7, 8), Agabus and others (Acts 11:27f.), those at Antioch (Acts 13:1), Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32) and Philip's daughters (Acts 21:9).
  - b. *Wise men (sophòs)* in Israel were not simply what is implied by this word in the Greek world. Instead, they were teachers of wisdom (*hakamim*) whose function was to develop practical applications of what, in Israel, was considered the Wisdom *par excellence*, the Law. Not necessarily inspired, the Christian wise men would be experienced, devout disciples qualified to teach, like Barnabas and Apollos (Acts 18:24ff.).
  - c. *Scribes* in Israel were not merely secretaries who copied Scripture, but men whose expertise in expounding it made them the recognized theologians in Israel. Although Paul was primarily a missionary (*apòstolos*), his undying mark on Christian history

was made by his theological writing in the form of New Testament epistles which explain Christian doctrine and its applications. Many others, too, would fit this category. (See notes on 13:52.) Mark and Luke are not merely Gospel *scribes* who limited themselves to chronicling, but men who, like the Apostles, Matthew and John, arranged their materials in didactic form so as to communicate the true sense of Jesus Christ. While these latter Evangelists were Apostles by mandate, they also functioned as *scribes* in the sense Jesus' original hearers would have understood Him here.

It is well to notice, however, that the functions of *wise men* and *scribes* overlapped historically in Judaism, so that these titles referred sometimes to the same person. (Cf. Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*, 40.)

2. Jesus verbally associates His Christian teachers with the Old Testament prophets and righteous men, so as to introduce a parallel between their respective ministries for which they were cruelly ill-treated. By specifying how His Pharisean opponents would retrace the well-worn pattern of victimizing God's ambassadors, He established the formers' spiritual kinship to the bloody fathers whose ruthlessness they claimed to repudiate.
  - a. *Some of them you will kill and crucify.* These are not necessarily the same people suffering, first, death, and then the added humiliation of exposure on a cross. Rather, some would be put to death by stoning (Acts 7:54—8:1; 26:10) or perhaps by the sword (Acts 12:1ff.); others by being nailed to a cross. (Cf. Matt. 21:35.) Because crucifixion was normally a method used by the Romans, the Lord is predicting some executions by Romans instigated by Jews (Peter? John 21:18f.).
  - b. *Some of them you will scourge in your synagogues.* (Cf. 10:17; Acts 5:40f.; 22:19; 26:11; II Cor. 11:24, the notorious 39 lashes.)
  - c. *Some you will persecute from city to city.* (10:23; I Thess. 2:14-16; Acts 13:45, 50; 14:2, 5; 17:5; 18:5f., 12; 19:33; 20:3; 21:27; 23:12; 24:1ff.; 26:11, and the Acts accounts of Paul's harrassment by Jews who, not content to see him leave their town, pursued him to other cities as well, in order to hinder his ministry (Acts 14:19; 17:13).

However, Jesus' mentioning this outrage preannounced unbelieving Israel's final response to His last, merciful invitations to accept His grace. So doing, they justified the judgment He must announce next:

## Answering for the Murder of the Martyrs

23:35 **that upon you may come all the righteous blood.** To which verb is Jesus' clause to be connected in the mind of the reader?

1. *I send you prophets . . . that upon you may come all the blood . . . ?* OR
2. *You will kill, crucify, scourge . . . and persecute . . . that upon you may come all the blood . . . ?*

In the former case, He appears to commission His prophets so as to increase unbelievers' guilt. In the latter, it appears that Jewish leaders desired to bring this condemnation upon themselves. From God's perspective, is the clause, *that upon you may come . . .*, an expression of purpose or result? That is, did Jesus send His messengers with the purpose of increasing Israel's guilt for rejecting them, or did it just turn out that way?

1. PURPOSE. Sending more emissaries was the only way to save anyone. He planned it that way, because, although He clearly risked raising the guilt-level of the obstinate and unrepentant, He contemporaneously multiplied the gracious opportunities to accept His generous invitation to the long-awaited banquet of God! (Cf. 8:11f.) Even if it meant the sacrifice of His heralds, He was offering complete amnesty to anyone who would surrender. By the convicting power of apostolic preaching He intensified their sense of guilt and so left the salvageable among them so deeply conscience-stricken that their repentance became real and lasting. (Cf. Acts 2:37 as a case in point of just such self-reproach produced by Peter's hammering home the fact that Israel had murdered their longed-for Messiah.)
2. RESULT: Nobody was forced, no one's freedom compromised. Everyone could cast his personal vote, for, or against, Jesus of Nazareth, but no one could escape the inevitable consequences of his individual decision. Jesus left open two free options, and, if anyone selected one of the two choices, no one would stop him. But, once the die was cast, nothing could halt the resulting avalanche of judgment plunging down on those who turned Jesus down. Thus, human freedom and divine sovereignty are respected to the very last.

Three questions remain to be considered: (1) Why should all this guilt be required of one single generation of Jews? (2) What is involved

in the great time-span from Abel to Zechariah? (3) Who is this Zechariah and what has Abel to do with Jesus' basic point? These questions find their solution in a correct understanding of what Jesus means by *all the righteous blood shed on the earth*. This expression appears to be absolutely universal. Does Jesus' broad condemnation apply to literally every innocent victim of violence, i.e. must the vengeance of God rain down upon Jesus' own generation to vindicate all these? To this, the premature reaction is: "Injustice! To blame one generation for all the world's innocent victims is unworthy of God!" But Jesus' concept in this paragraph (23:39ff.) is a unit. He began discussing the tombs of the prophets and of the *righteous* (*dikaïōn*, 23:29). It is the prophets' blood that was shed (23:30). Jesus' generation is composed of the sons of those who murdered these witnesses for God (23:31). Unless compelling reasons lead us to refer *the righteous blood* to some distant victims yet unmentioned, we must regard it as referring to that of God's witnesses who were martyred for their testimony to God's truth. (Cf. 10:40ff.; John 15:20.) Not the least of this *righteous blood* would be that of Jesus Himself (27:25; Acts 3:14f.; I Peter 3:18). Jesus includes *the righteous* right along with *the prophets*, because every righteous man who ever lived is a witness for God, living proof that God's will is knowable, just as surely a witness as a living prophet. Therefore, the suppressing of *the righteous* proves that their slayers reject the norm that God's people stand for.

This, then, explains why Jesus began with *Abel the righteous*. For, while that ancient saint did not relay an inspired message from God to man, as did the prophets, yet he became the first recorded witness for God when he stood firm in sacrificing what God required, notwithstanding the older brother's insistence on bringing something else (Heb. 11:4). So, by humbly offering his sacrifices in faith, he testified to the knowability and rightness of God's will. His is the first recorded example of a man's trusting God, doing what was right and being commended by God for it (Gen. 4:4f.). However, for this testimony he was murdered by the jealous hate of his brother, and thus became the first martyr in the battle between godliness and unrighteousness. His death cries out against anyone who "walks in the way of Cain" (Jude 11), victimizing his brother because his brother's actions are *righteous* (I John 3:12).

But who is *Zechariah*? Because the book of Chronicles occurs last in the Hebrew canon, the last martyred prophet of God in the Hebrew Old Testament is the priestly Zechariah, son of Jehoiada,

stoned to death in the court of the Temple (II Chron. 24:20ff.) He too had delivered God's Word, but was murdered by order of King Joash. As he lay dying, he gasped, "May the Lord see this and call you to account!" God DID see it and avenged His prophet's death (II Chron. 24:23ff.). But how could *Zechariah* son of Jehoiada be called in our text "*son of Barachiah*"? Either Matthew wrote these words or he did not.

1. If Matthew wrote them:

a. The priestly son of Jehoiada is not intended. Jesus may refer to martyrdom that occurred more recently than the close of the Old Testament, well-known to His hearers, but unrecorded elsewhere. This would compel us to surrender the view that He means all Biblical murders and refers, instead, to all martyrs for righteousness in pre-Christian history.

b. Jesus may refer to Zechariah son of Jehoiada.

(1) *Barachiah* and Jehoiada are possibly different names for the same father. Many Hebrews bore two names, e.g. Jechoniah = Jehoiachin; Gideon = Jerubbaal; Dan. 1:6. However, were this the case with such a famous father like Jehoiada, it is strange that he should never have been called by this other name in the Old Testament.

(2) *Barachiah* and Jehoiada are both "fathers" of *Zechariah*, however, in different senses, one being the true father and the other the grandfather. Accordingly, *Zechariah* would be grandson of the famous Jehoiada, but son of an obscure *Barachiah* whose name was registered in Levitical genealogies, knowable to the Jews and here cited by Jesus. This explanation is less likely, because the Old Testament chronicler lays stress on the martyr's being "Jehoiadah's son," as if immediate sonship were meant.

c. Least likely is the suggestion that Jesus intended a "Zacharias son of Baruch," unjustly accused and murdered in the Temple near the end of the Jewish war (Josephus, *Wars*, IV,5,4). The Lord speaks of *Zechariah*'s death as a fact already well-known, not a yet-future martyrdom. He does not say, "Whom you will slay," but *whom you slew*. Further, the names are different: "Baruch" is not *Barachiah*, however similar.

2. If Matthew did NOT write *Zechariah son of Barachiah*:

a. Perhaps Matthew wrote only *Zechariah*, as did Luke (11:51). If so, a very early copyist, remembering the more famous Old

Testament writing prophet's patronymic (Zech. 1:1), mistakenly supposed that Jesus alluded to him, rather than the almost forgotten son of Jehoiada, and erroneously inserted *son of Barachiah*, whereas Jeohoiada's son is meant.

- b. Perhaps Matthew originally wrote, *Zachariah son of Jehoiada*, but an early scribe, forgetting Jehoiada's son, considered "Jehoiada" a mistake to be corrected by altering it to "Barachiah," father of the Minor Prophet (Zech. 1:1).
- c. But in favor of these hypotheses there is no documentary evidence in the manuscripts, except the omission of *son of Barachiah* in the original Sinaiticus and Eusebius, and a comment by Jerome in his commentary on our text: "In the Gospel which is used by the Nazarenes, in the place of 'Son of Barachiah' we find written 'son of Jehoiada.'" These appear to be personal choices of scribes too isolated to affect the textual tradition.

Although a judicial assassination of Jeremiah's contemporary, Urijah (Jer. 26:23) took place about 200 years after that of Zechariah, Jehoiada's son, the latter's martyrdom appears literally on the last pages of the Hebrew Old Testament, and perhaps for this reason Jesus mentioned him as the end point.

### A MISCARRIAGE OF DIVINE JUSTICE?

Whether or not we have correctly identified *Zechariah*, Jesus' point still stands. If He meant Jehoiada's son, then the time span in His mind, from Abel to Zechariah, encompasses all the murders from the beginning to the end of the Hebrew Bible. Otherwise, from the first murder down to the latest assassination of God's prophet. But, regardless of the choice, with what justice can the Lord indict the religionists of His day for the brutal rejection of *the prophets and righteous men* over such a vast span of time, when His contemporaries did not even exist at the time of those atrocities? Several answers are possible:

1. In saying, *that upon you may come . . . whom you murdered*, the allusion is generically to the entire Jewish nation in all of its ages from its inception down to Christ. While Jesus' contemporaries could not rightly be indicted for crimes committed by their predecessors centuries earlier, nevertheless, by their hatred for God's servants (23:34), they qualify for membership in the one teeming

society of those who murder prophets. *Between the sanctuary and the altar* bespeaks the blind fury of the persecutors who knew nothing sacred, neither the person of God's prophet nor the holiness of His temple. Although this elucidates why the larger part of many generations of Israel is guilty of its personal crimes against God, it does not yet explain why one particular generation should receive the total brunt of the punishments for crimes reaching clear back to Abel, i.e. even before the official birth of Israel at the call of Abraham.

2. The terrible indictment is unequivocally levelled solely at Jesus' own generation. Why?
  - a. Because the past had prepared for the present. It is a fact observable in the history of nations that the catastrophes of a people are often the grim harvest of sins and errors sown long before. It may require generations for these to come to a head. Those who lit the fuse are often long gone before the explosion that blows the mountain of iniquity, burying beneath its weight only the contemporaries who, like their forebears, had shared in amassing the sin. But the past would lose with the present. The ancient, prophet-murdering fathers would now lose all they had so carefully transmitted to posterity, as their equally iniquitous descendents were swept away in the fury of God.
  - b. Because the present welcomed the past. By murdering God's Son, persecuting His apostles and other messengers, Jesus' contemporaries would sin in full light of their own history's lessons. Jesus' age stood at the end point of God's dealings with men, a period rich in accumulated evidence of the great criminality of this act, since God had shouted protests against the killing of His prophets clear back to the assassination of Abel! In full view of history's vindication of God's prophets, Jesus' generation would proceed to crucify Him who enjoyed the highest, most complete authentication by God who through Jesus had done the most evident and most numerous miracles. (Cf. John 7:31; 11:47f.) Every generation of sons that witness the previous instances of disobedience, hear the many warnings, observe the exemplary punishment of their fathers, and yet repeat the same disobedience, is to be judged more than simply as bad as their fathers. They are far more guilty than their predecessors and must answer for much, much more, because, by duplicating their fathers' sins in full light of their divine punishment, they

concur in their father's acts. The principle of divine justice is clear: the accumulated brilliance of all this light and the force of all the evidence against which they will have sinned multiplies the degree of guiltiness they would incur for having turned against it.

No wonder the wrath of God was timed to explode in that generation! More astonishing yet is the forty years of grace God bestowed on His people before outraged justice lashed Jerusalem in a holocaust of blood in 70 A.D. But here is a lesson: even as in the last days of the Jewish state the patience of God waited while the Church broadcast the Gospel in a final effort to save the savable, but a day came when the ax fell, so also today God's vengeance waits patiently while the number of those to be slain for their witness to His Word moves toward completion (Rev. 6:9-11). But that judgment and their vindication will come at last (Rev. 16:6; 18:20; 19:2).

**23:36 Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation.** Here again is the familiar theme of the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen in the Vineyard (21:40). This time, however, Jesus reveals the time-schedule for the hurricane of holy wrath that would break over Israel: *this generation*. He will enlarge upon this ominous threat in the next chapter when He describes the siege and taking of Jerusalem and reiterates the time-schedule (24:34). The wrath of God that destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and dispersed the unbelieving Jews among the nations, therefore, was neither unreasonable nor unexpected (Deut. 28).

The expression, *this generation*, as Jesus often employs it, is loaded negatively to mean "this crowd," "this people" referring to those people who refused to be persuaded of His Messiahship on the basis of the good evidences He furnished. (Cf. 11:16; 12:39, 41f., 45; 16:4; 17:17; Mark 8:12, 38; Luke 7:31; 9:41; 11:29-32, 50f.; 17:25; cf. Peter's expression: Acts 2:40, or Paul's, Phil. 2:15.) This common nuance however, does not exclude its literal meaning, "the people now living," i.e. all the people born and living at about the same time (cf. Matt. 1:17!) a sense which flows into the other: "a group of such people with some experience, belief, attitude, etc. in common," (cf. *genèd*, Arndt-Gingrich, 153). His antithesis in our text is "all previous generations" of prophet-murderers, as opposed to *this generation*.

Ironically, all of Israel's guilt, accumulated from all previous ages was finally and permanently to be borne away by the one perfect

sacrifice of the Lamb of God in that one *generation* (Heb. 9:15; Rev. 12:5, 9-11)! All those of that *generation* who would yet embrace this offer to divine mercy could be saved and miss the threatened disaster. (See on 24:15ff.) Unbelievers of that same last, characteristic generation (24:34), however, would feel the full impact of God's terrible punitive justice. (Deut. 5:9, note God's use of *generation*.)

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by Jesus' observation that the Pharisees "build the sepulchers of the prophets and garnish the tombs of the righteous"? What motivated them to do this?
2. To what "prophets and righteous men," now buried in the garnished tombs, does Jesus refer?
3. Who actually slew the prophets?
4. In what sense are the Pharisees the sons of the prophet-slayers?
5. What is "the measure of your fathers" that the Pharisees are ordered to "fill up"?
6. In what sense were Pharisees "serpents, a generation of vipers"?
7. Define "the judgment of hell" that the Pharisees could not escape.
8. In the New Testament Church identify the personnel referred to by Jesus as "prophets, wise men and scribes" whom He would send.
9. Name some messengers of Jesus Christ whom the unbelieving Jewish nation and its rulers (a) killed, (b) crucified, (c) scourged, (d) persecuted from city to city.
10. What does it mean for the blood of someone to come upon someone else in the phrase: "that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth . . . "?
11. Identify "Zechariah . . . murdered between the sanctuary and the altar." List three or four Zechariahs in the Bible, one of which may be the man mentioned by Jesus in this section. State the problems connected with any certain identification and furnish solutions to each problem wherever possible.
12. In what way did Jesus' prophecy come true that all the blood would come upon that generation?

TEXT: 23:37-39

37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy

children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! 38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. 39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. If the message of this chapter was addressed fundamentally to the Pharisees, how do you explain the shift in persons addressed, i.e. from the Pharisees to Jerusalem? What connection is there between the two concepts (Pharisees and Jerusalem) that would justify Jesus' concluding His piercing analysis of the former with a heart-broken warning to the latter?
- b. How does this closing section of Jesus' indignant indictment of the Pharisees show His basic, underlying attitude toward the wicked who rejected Him? How should it modify the opinion of those who assail Jesus for what they consider a bitterness incompatible with love?
- c. Jesus affirms, "How often would I have gathered your children together . . .," and yet the Synoptic Gospels record no significant time spent by Jesus in Jerusalem. How could Jesus make a statement like this, if He had not diligently labored at winning Jerusalem's populace to faith in Him? Or had He? On what basis would you answer this?
- d. Why was it that Jerusalem was so notorious for killing God's prophets? What was there about this city that made it so perilous for His prophets and a relatively rare thing for them to be murdered elsewhere?
- e. Can you list some possible reasons why Jerusalem refused to respond to the appeal of Jesus? (Cf. Mark 3:15-19; Luke 8:14; John 12:37, 42f.; 5:40-47.)
- f. Since the cry, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," had already been raised during the Triumphal Entry, is not this an argument that the present text is out of place and refers to a situation that occurred before Palm Sunday? If so, prove that it does. If not, what does Jesus mean by these words spoken in the context of the Last Week already in progress? Can He use the same words twice in differing situations, to communicate two slightly differing meanings?
- g. Do you think Jesus implies that the city would someday embrace a totally believing population that would welcome Him, acclaiming

Him as Messiah as the multitudes had done during the Triumphal Entry? Or would it be a purely individual reaction on the part of some and not others?

- h. In what sense would Jerusalem not see Jesus until she made the required confession?
- i. Do you think that this section is intended to furnish an appropriate conclusion to Jesus' address on Pharisaism? If so, why? If not, why not.
- j. What does this section have to say to the question whether Jesus can ever abandon those whom He loves and for whom He died, if these will not accept Him?
- k. What does this section reveal about the high dignity of Jesus?

### PARAPHRASE

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! the city that has continued to murder God's prophets and stone His messengers sent to you! How many times I have yearned to gather your inhabitants together under my leadership and protection, in the same way a hen gathers her little chicks under her wings. But you all refused! Notice, however, your House is left to you—desolate. I can assure you that you will never see me again until you can say, 'May God bless His Messiah!'"

### SUMMARY

Earthly Jerusalem's extraordinary opportunity to welcome God's last, greatest Prophet rendered more unmistakable the inveterate character of her rebelliousness, because she refused her only Savior. Now He must abandon her people's great House, leaving them to protect it as best they could against utter ruin. Their only, final hope of salvation lay in their raising the welcoming cry that recognized Him as their Messiah.

### NOTES

Contempt for His Marvelously Patient Compassion

**23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her!** This is Matthew's last reference to *Jerusalem*

by name. Even though after this Matthew will refer to "the holy city" (27:53) or speak simply of "the city" (26:18; 28:11), Matthew's choice not to name this city any more hereafter may have ominous significance. The earthly *Jerusalem* will be discarded by God after its having had such a dominant place in the history of His dealings with Israel.

Jesus rightly concluded His penetrating analysis of Pharisean hypocrisy with a heartbroken warning to Jerusalem, for various reasons:

1. *Jerusalem*, as theocratic center of the nation, was the supreme goal of ideal Israel. Any plan of God without sacred Zion was unthinkable. (Ps. 146:10; 147:2, 12ff.; and all of Zechariah's "Jerusalem" prophecies.) But the conspicuous historical reality was a stony-hearted city that concretely shared the Pharisees' hypocrisy and their readiness to silence God's messengers: *Jerusalem that killeth the prophets and stoneth them that are sent unto her*. Such a Jerusalem embodied both the Pharisees' ideals and their sins. At best and at worst, all that the Pharisees were morally, Jerusalem was. So, to condemn the one, in essence, is to address the other also.
2. But to switch from the Pharisee, the religio-political party whose philosophy infected wide segments of Israel, to Jerusalem, Israel's philosophical and ideological summit, gives Jesus a superb oratorical advantage. Many in Israel probably shared Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees. (Cf. "Fragment of a Zadokite Work" in *Pseudepigrapha*, edited by Charles, 785ff.; Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*, 29-38; Josephus, *Wars*, I,5,1-3.) Yet those who criticized the Pharisees could smirk complacently that THEY were not members of that hypocritical brotherhood, and that THEIR holiest joy lay in the exaltation of Zion, *Jerusalem*, the City of the Great King. Now Jesus must bluntly lay bare the unholiness and barbarous heart of *Jerusalem*, a city that, for all its past sacred associations, blatantly butchered the ambassadors of the Almighty! Concretely, *Jerusalem* is no better than the best of her people, but its strictest sect is notoriously hypocritical!
3. However, by switching from speaking to the Pharisees' party to addressing Jerusalem, Jesus flashes before His hearers one poignant personification: *Jerusalem*, mother beloved of all her children, all Israel collectively. Jesus' own love for the high ideals associated with Jerusalem led Him to seek and to save her children. Now, despite Jerusalem's unpromising precedents, He offers one more, longing invitation couched in the form of a warning that holds out a glimmer of hope.

4. To separate *Jerusalem* for separate censure is to focus attention on the stronghold of all those religious sects in Israel that had so bitterly opposed Jesus. So, He has not changed the subject. Rather, He has simply adjusted His aim and focused the scope of His warnings.

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* This repeated address indicates anguished love. (Cf. II Sam. 18:33; 19:4; Luke 10:41; 22:31; Jer. 22:29.) His address here cannot mean Jesus had felt no sympathy for the rest of the nation. His active ministries on Galilean soil and in Perea, even in Samaria, forever established His love for those districts too. The point here is that, through no fault of His own, He had been unable to convert those who would not be convinced in Jerusalem. All her sacred associations notwithstanding, her true, typical character must be exposed: she is *Jerusalem that kills the prophets and stones them that are sent to her!* (The present participles in Greek point to her continuing practice and resulting reputation.) Remember Jesus' severely ironical comment: "It cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33)! Stoning was the capital punishment intended for false prophets (Deut. 13:5, 10). Diabolically, Jerusalem turned the weaponry intended to protect God's people against the true messengers of God!

*How often would I have gathered thy children together!* The underlying assumption is that Christ had expended frequent, however unsuccessful, efforts to win Jerusalem to discipleship, and yet the Synoptic Gospels record no trips to Jerusalem or its suburbs. On the other hand, John registers five such visits between Jesus' baptism and this final visit to the city. Note, therefore, how incidentally Matthew here and Luke 13:34 imply that Jesus' appearances in Jerusalem recorded by John really had occurred, and that the purpose at which He aimed is precisely what we see reflected in John's account: great, gracious appeals addressed to Jerusalem to believe Him and be saved. (Cf. John 2:13—3:21; 5:1-47; 7:10—10:39; 11:1-45.) So, there is no contradiction between the Synoptics and John's Gospel. Rather than misrepresent the facts, the latter simply documents *how often* Jesus had made ill-received attempts to save Jerusalem.

*I would have gathered thy children together.* This is Jesus' estimate of Himself as He stands before Israel. He considers Himself Jerusalem's only Savior. *Even as a hen gathereth her chickens under*

*her wings*: in this heart-warming image Jesus compares Himself to a hen aware of grave danger to her little brood, by which He means Israel the nation. (Cf. Old Testament use of a similar figure: Deut. 32:11; Ps. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4; Isa. 31:5; Ruth 2:12.) *Thy children* refers to the people of Zion, hence, Israel in general. (Cf. Ps. 149:2; Joel 2:23 in the more literal translations.) But this nation belonged to Jesus as truly as the chickens to the hen. Clearly, Jesus had long foreseen the disaster—both spiritual and national—that lay ahead for His people. This is why He expended every effort to convince them to believe in Him and to find true safety in God's Kingdom as He presented it. But He is not merely Israel's benefactor and guide. His symbol of the hen pictures Himself as a Savior who throws His own life between His people and the menacing danger! But who is this who claims to be able to rescue them from imminent peril? Is it merely the 33-year-old Galilean rabbi, the former carpenter of Nazareth? Standing there offering Himself as Savior of Israel is the nation's true Owner, the Messiah of God!

Feel the conflict of two determined wills: *I would . . . but you would not* (*ēthélēsa . . . ouk ēthelēsate*). Jesus willed to save them, but their stubborn will shut out His influence. (Contrast John 5:40 and II Peter 3:9. See also Luke 19:14, 27.) His indefatigable efforts to convince the nation met with open-eyed, deliberate resistance, but He, the Son of God, weeping over their perverseness, had to admit defeat. Here is written the awesome freedom of the human will that can defiantly swagger in the presence of the gracious appeals of Almighty God and actually defeat His intention to save men! Even the Omnipotent God has chosen not to force the will of any man or nation He cannot persuade to repent. Individually, however, those converted will comprise the remnant of the saved, wooed and won by His merciful love. Paul, for example, knew he could not win them all, but this did not stop him at once nor make his efforts a mere pretense. (Cf. Rom. 9:1—10:3; I Cor. 9:22, "some," not all; Rom. 11:14.) Grace, in practice, refers to one person's free determination to save another, if the other is willing. But there is no way that he who makes the effort can save the other if the latter obstinately resists and finally rejects his gracious efforts. Therefore, grace can be resisted and rejected.

This final paragraph in Jesus' last public address before the cross forever proves that He was not just hurling vengeful diatribes at people who offended Him personally. Rather, His severe denunciation

of Pharisean religion was but the deeply regretful reading of God's just sentence against this unbelieving, contemptuous, unrepentant people. The anguished cry with which He closes (23:37) is of a piece with His bone-deep sadness when He wept over Jerusalem during the Messianic Entry (Luke 19:41-44). It is the Lord's mercy, passionately pleading with dying sinners. It is a spurned love astonishingly undiminished by their malice, incredibly uncooled by their stubbornness and divinely patient no matter how long it was taking.

But the outcome of Jerusalem's judgment of Jesus is not without consequence to its people. If they spurn the self-giving protection of the hen, they damn themselves to exposure to the talons of the eagle!

### The Consequence of Refusing Jesus Christ

23:38 **Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.** This ominous sentence declares as a settled matter the future desolation of what was dearest to every Hebrew. But what is meant by *your house*?

1. "The *house* of Israel" is a common Old Testament synonym for the entire NATION. (Cf. Jer. 12:7; Hosea 8:1; Ezek. 18:30f.) Israel had been the privileged people of God up to the age about to be inaugurated by Jesus through the Gospel. But, as He had taught earlier (21:43; 22:7), God would take these Kingdom privileges away from those whose hold on them was never more than a TENANCY. Further, God would send His armies to destroy those murderers of His servants, the prophets, and burn their city. Jesus depicts God's abandoning a mutinous, unbelieving nation, leaving it to its own devices to save itself from that desolation that must result from their deserting God's Anointed who could have saved them. To Israel had been granted exceptional opportunities to be the people of God, but these were despised by the majority. Only the remnant in Israel accepted Jesus and, with the Gentiles, became the new, true "Israel of God." (Cf. I Peter 2:9f.; contrast Exod. 19:5f.)
2. The *house* par excellence is the TEMPLE, the house in which dwelt the glory of Israel, the presence of God. (Cf. II Chron. 6; Isa. 66:1f.; notes on Matt. 23:21; see also 2 Baruch 8:2; Testament of Levi 15:1; 16:4 where "house" equals "temple.") Jesus affirms that, even as God had formerly abandoned His earthly dwelling to chastise His people, He would do it again. (Study Ezek. 10:1—11:23;

- cf. Jer. 7:2-14; 26:6; see Judg. 18:31; I Kings 9:6-9; I Sam. 4:22; Ps. 78:59-62.) Now, however, contrary to past hopes, according to which God would return to dwell in a purified sanctuary (Ezek. 43:4), Jesus holds out no such hope, except through submission to Himself as Messiah sent by God. This time, however, the glory of God would dwell in a new, far truer Temple, the people of God, the Church of Christ (Eph. 2:19-22; I Cor. 3:16f.; 6:19; John 14:23). Then, when the great temple veil parted from top to bottom when Jesus died (27:51), the Holy of Holies were exposed to common view, as if God deliberately declassd that building to indicate its profanation as a temple and His indifference toward it as a peculiarly holy place. It was not longer to be "the house of God" (12:4) nor "My house" (21:13), but *your house*.
3. Early Jewish thought pictured the CITY OF JERUSALEM as the *house* of God. (Cf. Enoch 89:50-72; 90:29-36; Testament of Levi 10:5.) If it is Jesus' thought, He addresses the city as He had earlier (23:37), now prophesying its ruin. (Cf. Luke 19:41ff.) But even though Jerusalem has once again become a Jewish city, it has no temple, no priesthood, no sacrifices and its people must defend it as best they can.
  4. In the spirit of the great imprecatory Psalm 69:25, Israel's *house* could mean THEIR DWELLING place on earth, especially in Palestine. The Psalm's context pictures the treachery, the atrocious crimes and the wilful cruelty of those who persecute God's righteous servants, and cries out for vengeance to the holy Judge. Accordingly, Jesus answers, this anguished prayer for justice is heard and judgment is about to fall, hurling the unbelieving nation from its dwelling place, leaving it like a decimated army's encampment or an empty Bedouin tent.
  5. Does Jesus mean the royal palace as symbolic of the earthly Davidic lineage? (Cf. the similarity between Matt. 23:38 and Jer. 22:5 in context.) Although there was no Davidic palace standing in Jesus' day and the Herod, whose palace stood within the city, was no scion of David, could not Jesus intimate that the royal, Davidic *house* upon which Israel's materialistic, Messianic hopes depended would disappear for lack of legitimate aspirants to the throne? Objectively, without Jesus the true Son of David, the throne of Israel is left desolate, hence the greater urgency that Israel confess Him to be the Messiah (23:39).

Regardless of which view is taken, the result is the same, because Jerusalem, the temple, the materialistic Davidic hopes and national Israel all went down together during the Jewish war in 66-70 A.D., with only an ill-fated politico-military resurgence under Bar-Cochba (131-135 A.D.). Chapter 24 will furnish the details. Now, Jesus formally severs Himself from Israel's *house*. What should have been a dwelling-place for God had become the center of spiritual revolt against Him and the market-place of vested interests in Judaism. The unique purpose for the continued existence of "the house of Israel" had ceased, so when Jesus walked out, with Him went the glory and protecting presence of God. When Jesus abandoned the Temple and Jerusalem, a deplorable epoch came to an end, leaving only an unhappy present and an ominous future. And yet even here our Savior cannot even threaten without showing. . . .

### A Glimmer of Hope in the Encircling Gloom

**23:39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.** Since the Lord begins by saying, "*For I say . . .*," His declaration explains why Israel's house would be left desolate: "You will *never ever* (Greek: *ou mé*) see me from now on until you say, Blessed is he." So, whatever ramifications this verse has, they must explain the desolation of Israel's famous house. No view of this text can be correct that ignores Matthew's book-length context in which he established that God rejects the exclusive claims of a purely fleshly Israel and welcomes the Gentiles to become His people too. (Cf. 3:7-12; 8:11f.; 10:6, 14f.; 11:20ff.; 12:41f.; 21:38—22:14.) Even so, questions arise:

1. In what sense must Jerusalem *see* Jesus: literally or with the eye of faith? After this moment Jerusalem saw Him literally, stretched out on a cross near the city (John 19:20; Luke 23:48). Earlier, Jesus had spoken cryptically about going where unbelievers could not come. Although they sought Him, they would be unable to find Him (John 7:33-36; 8:21-27; 13:33; 14:16f.). On the latter occasion He explained clearly to believers: "I shall go to Him who sent me" (John 14:19f.). Consistent with His promise, therefore, upon arising from the dead, He showed Himself alive, not to all men, but to pre-selected witnesses (Acts 10:40ff.). From that moment, therefore, anyone who desired to see Jesus must do so by faith.

2. Why *henceforth*, and not before? How does this limitation, "from this time forward," sharpen His intended meaning? Jerusalem had only seen Jesus physically and would only see Him thus again on the cross. But had Jerusalem ever really seen this young Galilean for what He really is, or would she ever? Having declared His love and longing to save His people, Jesus formally concludes His ministry as servant to the Jews. No longer will His voice be heard exhorting the nation to follow Him back to God. No longer would Israel marvel at His miracles that blessed the land. His time of public manifestation of Himself is over.
3. In what sense would Jerusalem's saying, '*Bless be he . . .*,' help her to see Jesus in the sense intended? Are His words intended as a gracious, even if veiled, offer of hope, or as a threat? Or both? The meaning is simple: unbelieving Judaism would never fathom the true significance of Jesus of Nazareth, never again see Him for what He presented Himself to be during the Messianic Entry into Jerusalem, until its people cried the believers' confession that Jesus is Christ. While this announcement threatens the majority who rejected Jesus' claims as untenable, it holds out hope for those individual members of God's people who would surrender the throne of their heart to the Galilean Carpenter lately acclaimed as Messiah by His enthusiastic disciples. So, to be brought to acknowledge His Lordship as Christ and true King of Israel is to see His true character. *Henceforth*, then, means that up to that moment Jesus had revealed His glory to Jerusalem and to Israel by a ministry replete with evidences of His true identity. From the moment of His departure from the Temple, this would no longer be true. He would go to the cross, through the empty tomb and on to glory, without ever turning back to plead with Israel, as He had in the past. With these words the Lord officially withdrew from the nation as such, concluding His public ministry, because His mandate to seek the lost sheep of the house of Israel has now concluded in their refusal to be saved. Any initiative to revive the relationship must be theirs. Everything He could do to save them has not been done.

In these words, *Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say . . .*, is couched an ominous threat: "If you will not accept me according to my true identity as God's Anointed during this day of grace, you shall not be permitted to see me as your long-awaited Messiah. This state of affairs shall continue until that

day when I appear a second time and then, to your eternal shame and regret, you will be forced to acknowledge me as Lord. Then it will be too late, since I will have become God's anointed Judge." (Cf. Acts 17:30f.; II Cor. 5:10; John 5:27.)

If it be thought that the Psalm quoted, "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord" (Ps. 118:26), is too positive in tone to bear the double sense of free confession and unwilling admission, the double sense is not unexampled. (Cf. Isa. 45:23-25 as Paul uses it in Rom. 14:11f. and Phil. 2:9-11.) It is not clear whether Jesus expects any of His enemies to surrender to His Lordship prior to that fatal day. However, His expression leaves open the possibility that some could.

### A PROMISE OF THE FINAL CONVERSION OF ISRAEL?

When Jesus uttered this warning earlier (Luke 13:34f.), His words found fulfillment in the Messianic Entry, as thousands welcomed Him with precisely this blessing (21:9). Now, however, that event is history and yet He repeats His warning. Consequently, some suppose that He now reveals that God would depart from the house of Israel to remain until that nation should see Jesus as the Christ in His true glory at His Second Coming and re-enter the Temple to usher in the Millennium. Some infer that all Israel on earth just prior to Jesus' return are the people to whom Jesus makes reference. In fact, *Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say . . .*, implies: "You shall see me when you say. . . ." Therefore, it is concluded that all Jews on earth at the Second Coming will somehow be instantly and miraculously converted by the returning Christ and will joyously receive Him whom their fathers rejected. This view, however, is unsupported for the following reasons:

#### 1. THIS THEORY IGNORES CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS.

Jesus addressed Jerusalem by name in the context and, by implication, all of Israel living in His day that shared Jerusalem's rejection of God's Messenger (23:29-37). If this text is correctly understood as holding out hope for, or threatening, anyone, it speaks primarily to Jesus' contemporaries, and secondarily to any of their descendants who share the spirit of these their fathers. Jesus does not say, "THEY shall not see me, till THEY say," as if referring to some

long-distant future generation of Israel living on earth at His return, but, "*YE shall not see me, till YE shall say. . .*" No interpretation of this text can be valid that is true of an Israel of the future that is not also true of Jesus' contemporaries in the same way.

2. **THIS THEORY IGNORES THE INDIVIDUALITY OF HUMAN NATURE.** Although the Jews addressed by Jesus here are uniformly disbelievers, not all would remain so. There would be diverse reactions to Jesus' words. While His address, *ye*, does speak of the whole class of unbelievers, this class consists of individuals, each of whom must decide personally to recognize Jesus as Messiah and submit to Him or not. (See notes on 3:11.) Jesus was not universally applauded by ALL ISRAEL. The nation was already being broken down into its individual components on the basis of each person's decision about Jesus. So, why should it be supposed that anyone but INDIVIDUALS would so acclaim Him from that moment forward, either at Pentecost or upon their later personal conversion, or even at the Second Coming when it will be too late? (See on 24:30; 26:64.)

In answer, some cite II Cor. 3:15f., but this text assumes an individual turning to the Lord, not necessarily a wholesale, national transformation.

3. **THIS THEORY IGNORES THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL CONVERSION.** Any theory of a latter-day blanket transformation of Israel misunderstands God's respect for the freedom of the human will and wipes out differences in people, as if such a conversion would occur automatically upon Jesus' return, notwithstanding all individual attempts to resist conversion prior to that moment.
- a. Wholesale conversion, without the participation of the free will of each single Hebrew, is not conversion in any true, Biblical sense. So, unless God chooses to work a psychological miracle that instantly and irresistably overpowers those unconvinced minds, then the present, ordinary rules for turning to God must suffice for their salvation. Hence, if God intends to respect man's free will, then the present Gospel offers all Jews the only true, valid alternatives (Rom. 1:16). So, if Jewish free will is left intact until final judgment, then the psychological probabilities involved (based on their millennial history from Moses to Christ) push us back to recall the general trend of Old Testament prophecies, namely, that only a remnant of the Hebrew

people would seek the Lord and turn in obedient faith to recognize Jesus as the Christ, not the whole nation. (Cf. Isa. 1:9; 4:2f.; 6:13; 10:20ff.; 11:11, 16; 29:19f.; 37:31f.; 65:9-17, etc.)

- b. Human free will not only guarantees man's freedom to differ with God, but also his freedom to differ with and from his fellows. What makes one Jew different from another includes the various attitudes of each separate Hebrew, specifically their submission to, or prejudice against, the Nazarene. Must it be thought that the returning Messiah shall miraculously evaporate all previous bias against the despised Nazarene Carpenter who must be the object of faith of all previous generations of both Jews and Gentiles down to that final day of His return? This is not a question of possibilities, since Jesus could do it with Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road, but, rather, a question of moral probabilities, because He has now included Jews and Gentiles alike under sin that He may have mercy on all and be the Lord of both, extending His sway over both by Gospel proclamation to both. Considering the kind of non-nationalistic, non-materialistic Kingdom Jesus has to offer and how radically it differs from Jewish nationalistic ideals, is it conceivable that the returning Messiah could eradicate all previous closed mindedness toward His universal, spiritual Kingdom of God, any better than the inglorious, humble Jesus of the first coming did?
- c. All texts on Biblical conversion claim that it is the formerly lowly Jesus of Nazareth and His Gospel for all men, with whom all of us have to do. (Cf. Acts 17:31.) However, His winsomeness appears only to the eye of faith (Isa. 53:2b). The scandal of the cross, however, will not hold back those believing Hebrews who will be saved, however fatally blinded their fleshly kinsmen (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1; I Cor. 1:18-24).
4. THIS THEORY DOES INJUSTICE TO A MAJORITY OF THE HEBREW PEOPLE. According to this view, in connection with His Second Coming, Jesus will make a special, private(?) appearance to Israel, in such a winsome form that Jews living on earth at His return will universally flock to confess His Lordship. But this means that, if Jesus' words refer exclusively to the few fortunate Hebrews living on earth at that far-off, yet-future date, then all those Jews, unlucky enough to die in unbelief before that magic date, will perish without having seen the all-persuasive Christ

and without His all-essential salvation. But, if physical descent from Abraham has any importance at all, are not these unfortunate losers "sons of Abraham" in this sense too? Conversely, if only those fortunate few living at that glorious future day are to be saved by a psychological miracle, are these the only "Israel" worth saving? From all that God has taught us about Himself, we must ask: is it just, or like God, to offer psychologically overwhelming proof to convince some Jews that is not also available to all other Jews? But is God so partial as to close His heart to every precious Jew whose only misfortune is to die before the deadline for Christ's return? But, if it be answered that these latter have the presently available Christian Gospel to save them, then the whole theory is compromised, because this admission offers hope to all Jews in any age on the same terms as the Gentiles.

5. **THIS THEORY, THEREFORE, DOES INJUSTICE TO THE UNIVERSALITY AND FINALITY OF THE GOSPEL.** To suppose that Christ intends to offer psychologically overwhelming evidence of His glory to convince Jews at His return, i.e. evidence that is not available to Gentiles, is to rewrite major sections of Christian theology as this is expressed in Romans, Galatians and Hebrews. True, God is sovereign and can freely show mercy on whomever He will (Rom. 9:14ff.). But those whom He has prepared beforehand for glory are those whom He has called by the Gospel, even us, not from the Gentiles only, but also from the JEWS (Rom. 9:24; II Thess. 2:14). Jews are already being offered the winsome, persuasive Christ through the Gospel. Must we degrade our definitive message by attributing superior convincing power to an uncertain, supposedly future personal appearance of Christ to Jews who have consistently turned down His own universal Gospel?

Some see in Zechariah 12:10 a prediction of Israel's marvelous change of heart when God would "pour out upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication" whereby they would "look upon me, the one they have pierced and mourn. . . ." In light of Revelation 1:7, the assumption is that Zechariah refers to a returned Christ. But no interpretation of Zechariah can be valid that ignores the Apostle's affirmation that Zechariah 12:10 was fulfilled at the cross when all-sufficient grace was made possible by Jesus' death (John 19:37). Jews' hearts began to be broken at Pentecost when they finally grasped the true

significance and identity of Him Whom they had pierced, were convinced by the gracious supplications of the Spirit speaking through Peter and cried out in true repentance (Acts 2:37). In this light, then, Revelation 1:7 does not necessarily predict a future *conversion* of those who crucified Jesus, but, rather, a future vindication of His claims against those who refused Him. (See notes on 24:30.) In fact, Zechariah predicts (1) individual, tribal mourning (Zech. 12:14): can modern Israel or any in Judaism establish its clan-lines to fulfill this? (2) He also predicts mourning for Him whom they have pierced "as one mourns for an only child" i.e. a bitter grief "as one grieves for a firstborn son." This speaks of weeping over an unalterable loss, not the weeping of penitence and change. This sense of finality and loss is reinforced by the comparative illustration: "the weeping of Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo" where Israel bitterly mourned the loss of that other son of David, the good king Josiah. (Cf. II Chron. 35:20-25.) So we must see the spirit of grace and supplication poured out by God on Jerusalem as His merciful offer of grace whereby God Himself pleaded with Israel to repent and accept the offer of His firstborn Son on the cross. But, says John (Rev. 1:7), the day will come when they shall see that same Crucified One in His true glory and the impenitent Jews will have more reason than ever to grieve their eternal loss.

6. THIS THEORY IGNORES THE CHRISTIAN REDEFINITION OF "ISRAEL." Any discussion of Israel in eschatology must take into account God's redefinition of the term "Israel." The expression, ". . . and so all Israel shall be saved," is often cited to sustain the continuing, privileged place of fleshly Israel in the eschatological planning of God (Rom. 11:26). However, Romans 11:26 is the conclusion of Paul's major section, Romans 9-11, where he carefully redefined what God means by the term "Israel" and distinguished the true "sons of Abraham" from those who are merely his physical descendants (Rom. 9:6-8, 22-27). Accordingly, there is now no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Rom. 10:12; Gal. 3:28). Jews, if they are to be saved, must submit to the same terms offered Gentiles, i.e. through the undeserved mercy of God (Rom. 11:32). Ungodly, unrepentant, unbelieving Israelites are not "of Israel," no matter what their pretensions (Rom. 9:6).

Conversely, believing Gentiles are true "sons of Abraham," notwithstanding their former lack of qualification. (Cf. Gal. 3:6-9, 14, 27-29.) Neither previous Jewishness nor former paganism count for anything now (Gal. 6:15). What counts with God is that new creation in Christ Jesus that constitutes the genuine "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). This explains how Paul can affirm so confidently: "And SO (in the manner described in Rom. 9-11) ALL ISRAEL SHALL BE SAVED." So, by Paul's inspired redefinition of "Israel," we who have submitted to Jesus as Lord constitute that "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." (Cf. I Peter 2:5, 9f.) This is the Israel to be saved.

7. THIS THEORY FAILS TO APPRECIATE THE CONDITIONALITY OF GOD'S PROMISES. Although all Israel is potentially capable of being saved, and although God has never withdrawn His gracious gifts to Israel nor regretted calling them, in practice, however, the nation as such has remained "a disobedient and contrary people" (Rom. 10:21). Because Paul understood that God's call is conditioned by their believing response expressed through obedient service (Rom. 11:29f.; cf. 16:26), his realism admitted only the possibility to "save SOME of them" (Rom. 11:14; cf. I Cor. 9:19-22). Can there be any hope for those who refuse to submit to His conditions?
8. THIS THEORY IS CONTROVERTED BY JESUS' PREFERENCE FOR HIS MULTINATIONAL CHURCH AS OPPOSED TO UNBELIEVING JEWS. To suppose that Judaism in the Last Day shall enjoy superior privilege or special opportunities to be saved is to forget Jesus' declared predilection for His Church, in contrast to "those who are of the synagogue of Satan, WHO CLAIM TO BE JEWS THOUGH THEY ARE NOT, but are liars." These latter, rather, He will "make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved YOU" (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

So, to see promised in Jesus' words a final, miraculous conversion of Israel is to miss the fact that hundreds, even thousands, of Jews had already that week and in the weeks shortly thereafter, willingly confessed Jesus as Christ and became Christians. These Hebrew Christians, for whom large portions of the great New Testament Epistles were specially penned, are the firstfruits of the savable Remnant chosen by grace (Rom. 11:5). But, if by grace, then not because they were Jews, but because believers won like anyone else.

## WHAT DOES THIS SECTION REVEAL ABOUT JESUS?

*He who comes (ho erchōmenos)* is often a Messianic title (cf. 11:3 notes). To recognize in the lowly Galilean the true Anointed of God is to see His true position and relationship to the Father and the Spirit. Now, however, "these things are hid from (Jerusalem's) eyes" (Luke 19:41f.). Had they known Who He really was, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory (I Cor. 2:8).

With only the Sermon on the Mount, especially the Beatitudes, in mind, many would falsely assume that gentle Jesus, meek and mild, could never raise His voice against anything. This full-blown warning against the spirit of hypocrisy and false teaching lays before our eyes a fuller, clearer picture of our righteous Lord.

Our magnanimous Lord holds out undeserved hope to a people that, on the basis of His exact, unflinching censure of their sham holiness and obstinate resistance to God's messengers, should have abandoned all hope of spiritual survival. But His terms of repentance are unmistakable: despairing Israelites must say, "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*" with all the meaning this concept of the Messiah conveys. They must turn to Him on His conditions, not theirs. So, the last word does not belong to Jesus' antagonists and critics, but rather to the living Christ who will gather for Himself out of these and all peoples a congregation of worshippers. Even today He is working on this project and will keep at it until that Day when we all, either with black despair or irrepressible joy, cry, "*Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!*"

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. Name some prophets sent by God, who were killed at Jerusalem.
2. Jerusalem's stoning of the prophets meant that the authorities had pronounced what judgment against them?
3. On what basis can we know that Jesus had really sought to persuade Jerusalem to accept Him as God's Messenger? List the Bible texts that prove the reality of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem (or in its vicinity), and which illustrate the truth of Jesus' affirmation: "How often would I have gathered your children. . . ."
4. Who are the "children" of Jerusalem? What is meant by this expression?
5. Explain the illustration of the hen and her chicks, showing how

Jesus meant it. Show (1) who is the hen, (2) who are the chicks, and (3) why she tried to gather them under her wings.

6. According to Jesus, what is the basic reason He could not save Jerusalem?
7. In what other historic moment had Jesus been acclaimed with the words: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord"?
8. What is the "house" that was about to be "left . . . desolate"? In what sense was it "left unto you"? Who intended to abandon this "house" in this way?
9. On what other occasions had Jesus pronounced a prophecy quite similar to this one?
10. To what future moment did Jesus point when He said, "You will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'"? Prove your answer.
11. In what sense was it true that, from the moment of Jesus' pronouncement, Jerusalem would not see Him any more? How long would He be thus invisible to Jerusalem? Did Jesus make any public appearances after the resurrection? If so, when and to whom?
12. Had Jesus ever before prophesied this disappearance? If so, when and what did He mean? (Cf. John 7:33f.; 8:21.)
13. Explain the relationship that Jesus sees between seeing Him and Jerusalem's crying, "Blessed be he . . ." ("You will not see me again, until you say. . .") In what sense would saying "Blessed be he . . ." help Jerusalem "see" Jesus in the sense He intends?

## CHAPTERS TWENTY-FOUR AND TWENTY-FIVE

### SECTION 60

## JESUS DESCRIBES THE LAST DAYS OF THE JEWISH STATE AND HIS SECOND COMING

(24:1—25:46)

### STUDY OUTLINE: CHRIST'S PROPHETIC DISCOURSE

#### I. OCCASION (24:1-3)

- A. Disciples Marvel At the Magnificence of Jerusalem's Temple (24:1)
  - B. Jesus Predicts the Temple's Destruction (24:2)
  - C. Disciples Ask For Clarification (24:3)
- Jesus' answers: His prophetic discourse . . .

#### II. THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM AND ITS TEMPLE (24:4-35)

- A. General Warning Against Misleading Signs Not Related to the End (24:4-13)
  - 1. False Christs are not the signal (24:4, 5)
  - 2. International war is not the signal (24:6, 7a)
  - 3. Disturbances in nature are not the signal (24:7b, 8)
  - 4. Troubles inside the Church and out are not the signal (24:9-13)
    - a. Persecution of the Church (24:9)
    - b. Religious confusion and widespread faithlessness (24:10-12)
    - c. Individual perseverance one's only hope (24:13)
- B. Specific, True Information About Jerusalem's Destruction (24:14-28)
  - 1. The true signals of the nearness of Jerusalem's fall (24:14, 15)
    - a. World-wide Gospel proclamation signals the approximate approach of the end (24:14)
    - b. Jerusalem besieged is the precise, decisive signal of the end (24:15)
  - 2. Urgent, practical instructions for rapid escape (24:16-20)
  - 3. Motivation: great, unprecedented tribulation (24:21)
  - 4. Duration: short but terrible (24:22)
  - 5. Warning: No hope of Christ's personal coming during the siege (24:23-28)

## THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

- a. Despite apparently miraculous signs, all false hopes of deliverance raised by false prophets must unswervingly be disregarded (24:23-26)
  - b. Christ's true coming will be too obvious to require prophetic announcement (24:27)
  - c. Israel's hopeless deadness cannot but attract scavengers: no hope of deliverance, just punishment. (24:28)
- C. The Theological Result of Jerusalem's Fall (24:29-31)
1. The time connection: "Immediately after" Jerusalem's great tribulation (24:29)
  2. The collapse and removal of the old, established luminaries (24:29)
  3. The Messiah's victorious, heavenly reign vindicated (24:30)
  4. Worldwide proclamation of the Gospel and its results—the beginning of the Gospel year of Jubilee(?) (24:31)
- D. Encouragement to Believe Jesus (24:32-35)
1. Leaves are a signal of summer's approach (24:32)
  2. Similarly, the foregoing clues signal the arrival of God's Kingdom (24:33)
  3. All these events must occur in Jesus' generation (24:34)
  4. The certainty of the predicted events (24:35)

### III. CHRIST'S SECOND COMING (24:36—25:46)

- A. The Date Known But to God (24:36)
- B. Stories Illustrating Important Features of the Final End-Times (24:37—25:46)
1. Illustration from life before the flood: "Business as usual" (24:37-42)
  2. Illustration of the burglar: "The time is unpredictable, so be always ready!" (24:43f.)
  3. Illustration of the Conscientious and the Hypocritical Servant (24:45-51) "Jesus' Return may be delayed."
  4. Illustration of the Ten Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids: "Adequate preparation must be made in time!" (25:1-13) "The fate of the unprepared"
  5. Illustration of the Wise and Foolish Stewards: "The present is a stewardship of God's goods entrusted to us according to our individual ability, to be invested for His advantage, because an accounting will be given." (25:14-30)
  6. Illustration of the Sheep and the Goats (25:31-46)
    - a. The Second Coming and the judgment will be contemporaneous (25:31)

LAST DAYS OF JEWISH STATE AND SECOND COMING

- b. The judgment will be universal (25:32, 33)
- c. The basis of judgment will be our everyday usefulness and service to others (25:34-46)
- d. The results of the judgment will be permanent (25:46)

JESUS' ESCHATOLOGICAL DISCOURSE  
VISUALIZED BY CONTRASTS

Marcellus Kik (*Matthew XXIV*) suggests the following helpful outline of Matthew 24, 25:

FIRST SECTION Mt. 24:1-35	CONNECTING LINKS Mt. 24:34-36	SECOND SECTION Mt. 24:36—25:46
<p align="center"><b>THE FALL OF JERUSALEM DESCRIBED</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>TIME TEXT</b> Mt. 24:34 "This generation will not pass away till all these things take place."</p> <p align="center"><b>TRANSITION TEXT:</b> Mt. 24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels, nor the Son, but the Father only."</p>	<p align="center"><b>THE END OF THE WORLD DESCRIBED</b></p>
<p align="center"><b>TIME</b> Definite description of the period preceding the judgment on Israel. Disturbing events are just false alarms typical of this period.</p>		<p align="center"><b>TIME</b> The time of the world's end known only to the Father, therefore, no precise signs of the time given.</p>
<p align="center"><b>SIGNS GIVEN:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. General sign of the approximate approach of Jerusalem's end: worldwide Gospel proclamation (24:14)</li> <li>2. Precise sign of Jerusalem's death-date: abomination of desolation, Jerusalem surrounded by armies (24:15)</li> </ol>		<p align="center"><b>NO SIGNS TO BE GIVEN:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Life going on as usual (24:37-42)</li> <li>2. A thief gives no warning (24:43, 44)</li> <li>3. Jesus' coming will be delayed; hence, cannot be expected with certainty (24:48; 25:5, 19). The only possible preparation must be constant vigilance.</li> </ol>
<p align="center"><b>SCOPE</b> Prophecies limited to a geographically specific locality: Palestine. (24:16-28)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Destruction of Temple (24:1)</li> <li>2. People in Judea must flee (24:16)</li> <li>3. Only the land of the Sabbath is involved (24:20)</li> <li>4. Events would not affect the nearby mountains (24:16)</li> </ol>		<p align="center"><b>SCOPE</b> Prophecies universal in scope that concern the entire world. (25:32; cf. Luke 21:34-36)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Judgment of all men, not just Jews (25:32)</li> <li>2. No warnings to flee as all escape now impossible.</li> <li>3. Final judgment not located on earth but in heaven.</li> </ol>
<p align="center"><b>ABNORMAL TIMES</b> "those days" (plural) Jerusalem died slowly, foreseeably</p>	<p align="center"><b>QUITE NORMAL TIMES</b> "That Day" (singular) Judgment to come rapidly, quite unexpectedly</p>	

In light of these significant differences between the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world, it is unjustifiable to assert with many that "the destruction of Jerusalem serves as a predictive type of the final judgment, so that what is affirmed of the one must also be precisely true of the other." How could one event which, in important details, is so radically different from another event be thought to forepicture the latter? By His clarity of language, Jesus separated the two events. The only true similarity between them is the astounding triumph in each case whereby the glory of Jesus shall be definitely revealed.

## THE AUTHENTICITY OF JESUS' PROPHECIES

Christian apologetic interest in this chapter can shout to the world, "See? Jesus' prophecies concerning the fall of Jerusalem came true, just as He said. We should believe His promises to come again, judge the world and bring victory to His followers, because of His reliability." Therefore, we must ask whether these predictions were truly uttered before the fact, or, as some claim, a clever rewriting of history to give Jesus undeserved credibility.

Our Lord's language is not perfectly free from some vagueness, as even modern Christian commentaries thereon illustrate by their difficulties in identifying precisely His allusions and references. But these very obscurities serve to guarantee the prophetic genuineness of His words. These chapters are not history penned after the fact and counterfeited as real prediction by its supposedly unknown authors. In fact, a forger, inventing this prophecy after Jerusalem's fall, would more probably have sidestepped all unclarity to exalt how precisely Jesus foresaw the events forty years earlier and how this prediction validates His prophetic claims.

Further, if these prophecies had been recorded following the events, the silence of the Synoptic Gospels themselves is without explanation, since none mention the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecies. Luke, for example, is not averse to recording fulfilments (Acts 11:28). Why not here too? Because the events predicted had not yet occurred.

## THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS DISCOURSE

Jesus' purpose from first to last is practical. A detailed schedule of "Last Days Events" was not even a consideration for Him. Rather, the counsel of prudence with which He begins (24:4), aims to take our eyes off speculation about future events and put our feet on

solid ground to prepare ourselves and others in the Present in which we find ourselves. His goals for preaching this sermon touch the lives of His disciples immediately, not merely some yet unborn, future generation. Foster lists five important targets this message aims to hit:

1. This message unmounts every goal the nationalistic movement of the Zealots and their sympathizers dreamed to realize. The worldwide proclamation of the Gospel was to substitute for materialistic materialism as the divine means of victory. In the program of God with regard to national Israel, Rome was to conquer, but the final Kingdom would be of God, not Caesar's.
2. Only the Word of Christ is permanent. Nothing men have thought, done or built—not even the Temple of God in Jerusalem—is permanent.
3. Jesus proclaimed His own certainty that His fiercest enemies would go down in shame and defeat, even though they condemn Him to death and execute that sentence. Disciples, shaken by His death, could take heart and believe that unlimited victory would not belong to Caiaphas, Annas, Herod or Pilate, or to anyone else but to Jesus!
4. This message furnishes proof of the validity of Christ's prophetic authority. Although the suffering and death of the persecuted Christians would strain their confidence to the utmost, this prophetic declaration of Jerusalem's doom, when vindicated by its historical realization, would prove Jesus correct and validate the believers' confidence in everything else He taught.
5. The priorities obvious in this discourse are two: to furnish His disciples with critical information whereby they could foresee and elude Jerusalem's downfall, and at the same time be ever prepared for Jesus' return to earth.

## SECTION 60

### JESUS DESCRIBES THE LAST DAYS OF THE JEWISH STATE AND HIS SECOND COMING

#### I. THE OCCASION (24:1-3)

(Parallels: Mark 13:1-4; Luke 21:5-7)

1 And Jesus went out from the temple, and was going on his way; and his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the

temple. 2 But he answered and said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. 3 And as he sat on the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what *shall be* the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose the disciples wanted to show Jesus the Temple buildings? Had He not seen them before? Did they think He was not sufficiently impressed with the Temple's magnificence? Why did Jesus redirect their thinking?
- b. What characteristic of true discipleship comes to light in the fact that the four fishermen-disciples came to Jesus privately for explanations?
- c. Mark and Luke quote the disciples as asking, "When will this be? What will be the sign when this is about to take place?" Matthew quotes them as adding, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" To what extent are the disciples' questions a key to the true interpretation of Jesus' answer?
- d. Do you think Jesus answered their question as asked, or did He need to furnish further information before it could begin to be treated?
- e. How could the disciples have ever arrived at the conclusion that the predicted destruction of the Temple had anything to do with Jesus' "coming and the close of the age"?
- f. Since "your coming" (Greek: *tês sês parousias*) is the ordinary expression for Jesus' great Second Coming, (1) where did they get the idea He was going to be absent for a time, after which He would "come"? and (2) did they understand at that time all that we learn about this event from great texts like I Corinthians 1:7; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; II Thessalonians 1:7ff.; John 14:3; I Timothy 4:1, etc.?
- g. On what reasonable basis did the disciples expect some sign to be given near the time of Christ's coming which would signal its arrival?
- h. Some believe that Jesus describes the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world, making the former a symbol of the latter, so that the signs which precede the former become, even if on grander

scale, signs that herald the latter. What is the basis of this contention? Is it a correct view of what Jesus actually did in His discourse? If so, why? If not, why not?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

As Jesus abandoned the Temple and was going away, His disciples came up to call His attention to the temple buildings. One of them exclaimed, "Master, look with what magnificent stonework and votive offerings the Temple is decorated! What magnificent buildings!"

But Jesus answered him, "You see all these grandiose buildings? I can tell you for sure that the time will come when there will not be left here one stone on top of the other. Everything you are now gazing at will be demolished!"

Later, as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives on the side facing the Temple, the disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew, approached Him privately with this question: "Teacher, when are these things going to happen? And what will be the signal when all these things are about to take place, that is, your second coming and the close of the present period of time?"

## SUMMARY

Marvelling disciples are awed by the beauty and apparent permanence of Jerusalem's Temple, but Jesus foretells its destruction. Later, some of them request an explanation: "When will this happen and what will be the signal?"

## NOTES

### A. Disciples Marvel at the Temple

24:1 **Jesus went out from the temple and was going on his way.** Several reasons suggest that this is no mere change of scenery on the part of Jesus. While it is true that the long day of discussions is over which began the morning after the Triumphal Entry (cf. 21:23—23:39; Mark 11:20, 27, 35, 41; 13:1), something else has happened, something evidenced by Matthew's two distinct verbs: *Jesus left the Temple and was walking away* (*exelthôn apò toû hieroû eporeûeto*). In this simple redundancy? In fact, to exit through the gates of this practically fortified citadel is to leave the Temple, as there was no surrounding campus, parking lot or terraced lawn. Thus, Matthew's verbs suggest that Jesus' move is deliberate, specific and prophetic:

1. This verse concludes Jesus' stunning, final message to Jerusalem in which He summed up Israel's evil and pronounced her doom due to occur in that generation. There He threatened the desolation of Israel's famous "House," because of the nation's bitter, bloody antagonism to God's prophets and Jesus' representatives (23:29-39). Three elements in chapter 24 find their roots in chapter 23, a fact which suggests their connection in the mind of Jesus:
  - a. "this generation" (23:36; 24:34)
  - b. the "desolation" of the Temple (23:38; 24:15; cf. Luke 21:20)
  - c. persecution of Jesus' disciples (23:34; 24:9)
2. Even before leaving Galilee, Jesus astounded His followers with dire comments about the dark fate of unbelieving Jerusalem and its Temple (Luke 11:50; 13:35). Amid the joy of His Messianic Entry into the city, He wept over its terrible destiny (Luke 19:41ff.).
3. Now *his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple*. This reaction reflects their natural, even if wrong-headed, response in these circumstances. They animatedly express their shock at His startling announcement of the final abandonment of Israel's House (23:34-39). They struggle for adequate descriptives to picture the beauty of the edifice (Mark 13:1; Luke 21:5; cf. 1 Macc. 3:2-7). Their excited words are not simply the awed exclamations of reverent Galilean pilgrims in from the provinces upon first visiting the Holy City. It is not likely that this is the first time these Apostles have admired the Jerusalem sanctuary, when every Hebrew is required by law to worship there three times EVERY YEAR (Deut. 16:16). Rather, their wistful comments draw His attention to the magnificent permanence of this construction, in order to lodge a low-key appeal against His previous, ominous predictions of its overthrow. Because of the important role this Temple played in the plan of God and in the history of Israel, it not unlikely appeared to them well-nigh incredible that this historic place of communion with God could be left desolate in their own lifetime. Thus, even the disciples' naivete required that Jesus act decisively.

So, when *Jesus left the temple*, this was the moment He decisively abandoned that sanctuary. This prophetic act prefigured God's final departure therefrom and sealed the doom of that ill-fated capital and its people. Not only is the long day of discussions over, ALL discussion with Jerusalem, Israel and the Temple is over, as far as Jesus personally is concerned. His mission to the lost sheep of the

house of Israel is terminated, so He left the city, having done all He could to save it. There came a time when further pleading became useless. The testimony is now complete and satisfactory. Now the responsibility lies with those who must decide. From this moment forward Jesus would not speak personally to Israel. If they would believe His later witnesses, they could yet be saved (John 15:26f.; Luke 24:45-49; Acts 1:8).

In retrospect, therefore, there is discernible here the repetition of a historical, prophetic symbol. Just as the glory of God departed from the Temple during the Babylonian exile (cf. Ezek. 11:23; 1:28; 8:2-4; 9:3; 10:1, 4, 18f.; Zech. 14:3f.), so when Jesus of Nazareth strode out of the Temple, the true glory of God abandoned it. The true Temple of God, the glorious dwelling place of God in the Spirit, would always, and as truly as ever, be in Jesus Christ and in His people (Col. 1:19; 2:9; I Cor. 3:16f.; 6:19f.; Eph. 2:22). That which had already served its purpose would soon become obsolete and disappear altogether with its covenant, its priesthood, its ceremonials and its sacrifices (Heb. 8:13). Further, how could Jesus become greatly excited over a mere stone building, when He Himself was the highest expression of the dwelling of God on earth?

### B. Jesus Predicts the Temple's Destruction

**24:2 But he answered and said unto them.** Clearly Jesus' attitude toward the Temple and City clashes with their enthusiasm. *See ye not all these things?* What a contrast between what Jesus saw in the Temple and what drew the reverent attention of His followers! While they admire the superficial, He looks below the surface. They reminisce over noble stones and votive gifts that bespeak a glorious national past, but He contemplates the long history during which these sacred precincts were polluted by the sins of this very nation. The majestic structure of the present occupies their mind, but He perceives the approaching disaster that must obliterate this temple profaned by greed, ostentation and other sins of the spirit. He had wept over souls of inestimable value doomed to eternal loss, whereas they are ready to mourn over STONES doomed to a dubious future on a rubbish heap! As He brooded over His last great invitation to an unrepentant nation (23:34-39), *these things* not unlikely refers to more than mere holy buildings. He refers also to what the Temple stood for. *These things* must also include a corrupt, ungodly traditionalism that blindly could not discern the voice of God in His

prophets. Jesus challenges His men, "As you look at the Temple, do you not also see the sins of its people, the corruption of its priesthood and their indifference toward God and His Messiah, which require its judicial desolation—*do you not see all these things?!?*"

*There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.* The only Savior and rightful King of Jerusalem foresees the imminent divine judgment brewing over His City and His Sanctuary, because its people had not recognized what elements contributed to the true "Peace of Jerusalem" (Luke 19:41ff.; Matt. 21:12ff.). His response cancels all hope that the City and Temple can be saved.

The Jewish Temple is one of history's ironies. Not even completed in Jesus' day, the construction had already taken 46 years (John 2:20). Begun in the eighteenth year of Herod the Great (19 B.C.; *Wars*, I,21,1), the entire complex was terminated about 86 years later in the days of the procurator Albinus, 62-64 A.D., just a few years before the outbreak of the ill-starred Jewish war against Rome. (Cf. *Ant.* XV,11,1; XX,9,7.) Unblessed by God, this sanctuary was destined to be demolished only six years after its completion. (Cf. Ps. 127:1.) Jesus had just prophesied the "desolation" of Israel's famous Temple and all it stood for (23:38). Now He clarifies that "desolation" means destruction.

*Not one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.* The City and its Sanctuary had been carefully constructed one stone upon another (cf. Hag. 2:15). Now it is to be dismantled, not by the gradual dilapidation of time's ravages, but by the savage anger and fierce hatred of its enemies bent on its violent overthrow, (*kataluthésetai*, break down into its component parts; dissolve; destroy, demolish, overthrow; throw down). Some of the Temple's foundation stones were massive, weighing above 100 tons. Josephus adds that these enormous stones were plainly visible on the outside of the Temple. Some he measures as 12.5 meters long, 4 meters high and 6 meters wide, representing a mass of 300 cubic meters (roughly 900 cubic feet). For full descriptions of Herod's Temple, consult Josephus' *Ant.* XV,11,3-5; XX,9,7; *Wars*, V,5,1-8.

In the fulfilment not only was the Temple burned despite Titus' efforts to save it, but it was so demolished that, according to the Talmudists, Terentius (Turnus) Rufus, left in command of the Roman occupation army at Jerusalem, "plowed up Sion as a field, and made Jerusalem become as heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high

places of a forest'' as foretold by Micah 3:12 and cited in Jeremiah 26:18. Not unlikely this commander of occupation was the same who executed Titus' order to raze most of the wall to the foundation and demolish what remained of the Temple and City, leaving three major towers and the western wall to show the greatness of the city subjugated by Roman valor. (Cf. *Wars*, VII,2,1 with 1,1.) The fact that these stone constructions were allowed to remain does not nullify Jesus' prediction, since His graphic expression, *not one stone upon another*, need not be pushed to a literal extreme. Rather, Jesus pictures here what Josephus later described: Jerusalem's complete destruction as a city (*Wars*, VII,1,1).

But for the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those who dug it up at the foundation, that there was nothing left to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind.

With His brief prophecy, Jesus dropped the subject. Astonished silence intervened as the small company wound its way eastward out of the City and across the Kedron Valley.

### C. Disciples Ask for Clarification

24:3 **And as he sat on the mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately.** Silent, dumbfounded, this small cluster of disciples climbed the Mount of Olives (to the Garden of Gethsemane? cf. John 18:1, 2), overlooking the Temple area on the opposite hill to the west. Their vantage point offered them a panoramic view of the main features of the entire City. At one sweep of their gaze they could see immediately in front of them the glorious Temple (Mark 13:3). To the left, on the right and behind it lay Jerusalem's walls and towers, its palaces and streets, its theater and gymnasium. From Olivet's summit to Jerusalem's east gate was less than a kilometer (1/2 mile) by the direct path. The city's magnificence, viewed from up there must have made it more incredible and heart-breaking to accept Jesus' stunning prediction. This site for the discourse that follows is highly significant, because they sat discussing, not some vision of a future Jerusalem and Temple, but the desolation of a literal, material

city and temple right before them (23:38; 24:2f., 15). Had Jesus intended the former, He should have said so in this discourse, especially since every word describing the suffering of Jerusalem's inhabitants, its desolation and desecration would most naturally have been interpreted literally by His first interpreters, unless He furnished those listening disciples some clear indication that He did not refer to the literal city in full view there before them. But this He did not do.

**The disciples came to him privately**, straining to know more. That they approached Him *privately* for further instruction on a difficult-to-accept subject measures the depth of their discipleship. They do trust Him to teach them, even if what He says must run counter to their best understanding of the subject, even if His doctrine is at first incomprehensible or unacceptable. Sketching in scene after scene, Jesus related the prophecies to their personal needs, fears and future ministry. He furnished practical information they needed for giving proper leadership to the Church. No interpretation of this chapter can call itself sound that lays great stress on future eschatology and ignores this practical concern for Christians of the first century, as if Jesus were more concerned about predicting the end of the world than about helping His own dear disciples to face their own near future with understanding.

**Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?** *These things*, contextually, are the events just predicted: the fall of Jerusalem's temple (24:2). If, on the sole basis of His prophecy, they could formulate questions that involve even His Coming and the close of the age as well, they obviously assumed that these three events are in some way connected, if not contemporaneous. It is not fruitless to ask in what sense the Twelve understood their questions, for two reasons:

1. Such an examination will help us to understand how Jesus treated their curiosity. This should cure us of that obstinate curiosity and sign-seeking sensationalism that has marred the history of prophecy studies, especially that fanatical exegesis connected with this chapter.
2. It will also lead us to learn whether He answered their questions as asked or not.

Does it really matter what the disciples meant? Objectively, no, except insofar as their questions introduce the subject, since what really counts is Jesus' teaching which actually corrects any misconceptions their questions reveal. Subjectively, with respect to the interpreters,

however, their questions must be analyzed carefully, since so much weight has been placed on them. In fact, in these questions expositors today seek an outline of Jesus' discourse and expect His answers to match that outline. However, if the disciples framed a misguided question, then their queries are irrelevant as an indicative outline, and we must not only see this, but also discern how the Lord corrected their misinformation. To accomplish this, we must ask what meanings they could have intended by the words they used.

1. *Thy coming (tês sês parousias; see Arndt-Gingrich, 635; Kittel TWNT, V, article parousia)* could refer to three things:
  - a. "Presence," unlikely, because He was already present. Hence, it could have no meaning here, unless His absence were specified in the context, implying the return of His "presence," in which case the meaning "coming" would be required, not "presence."
  - b. *Coming* meant the coming of an invisible deity who revealed his presence by some expression of his power.
  - c. *Coming* also referred to the personal arrival of a high-ranking official, such as kings or emperors, during visits of state to a province under their rule.
2. *The end of the world (sunteleias tou aiônos)*, since *aiôn* may signify "a time, an age; a very long time, eternity; the material universe," may picture at least two distinct concepts:
  - a. The end of an epoch, the winding down of a given era.
    - (1) *The end of the JEWISH world.* Jesus Himself died at *the end of the world* (Heb. 9:26). The Christian age of the Holy Spirit began at the end of God's former revelations (Heb. 1:2; *ep'eschâtou tôn hêmerôn toutôn*; Acts 2:17; I Cor. 10:11; I Peter 1:20). *The end of the Jewish world* only meant the conclusion of exclusively Jewish privilege and the offering of the Gospel and Kingdom privileges to the Gentiles (21:41, 43; 22:10).
    - (2) *The end of the CHRISTIAN era* (Matt. 28:20). The end of OUR world, however, is not unlikely contemporaneous with the following sense.
  - b. *The end of the material universe* with its dissolution of the present world system, the end of time as well as final judgment and the beginning of eternity for man. (Cf. II Peter 3:3-13; Matt. 7:22; 13:39f., 49; John 6:39; 11:24.)

What is important to discover is the disciples' mentality at the moment, not their understanding after Jesus' revelations given here or further

instruction by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:6). The only reason they mention *the end of the world and thy coming* in context with a question about Jerusalem's end is that by mentioning these other events, they wrongly think they are asking something significant about the latter.

Further, not without justification the disciples expected God to furnish some great sign from heaven that would warn of the near approach of the world's end, Jerusalem's destruction and of Christ's coming. After all, had not God's past dealings with His people taught them to expect that events of such immensity and significance as these be foretold by heavenly wonders that signal their immediate arrival so that appropriate preparation could be made? But, in this, as are so many curious Christians, they were mistaken, as Jesus will show.

So what did the disciples ask Jesus?

1. If they ask Him: "*What shall be the sign of your invisible coming which reveals your presence by some expression of your power over Jerusalem that has rejected you, that sign which, at the same time, marks the end of the Jewish dispensation?*" then Jesus answered this question. Even though it does not exhaust His eschatological concept, it is correctly framed and expresses a true grasp of at least part of Jesus' intentions regarding the nation of Israel.
2. If they mean, "*What shall be the sign of your personal coming in glory to visit your people, that sign that marks the end of the Jewish dispensation?*" they were mistaken to connect His final *parousia* with the end of the Judaism that had existed until 70 A.D., as He will show.
3. If they mean, "*What shall be the sign of your personal coming in glory and of the dissolution of the material universe?*" then they were mistaken to expect forewarning of an event for which God would give no signs. Further, to connect these events with the conclusion of the Jewish national economy in Jesus' generation is to confuse two widely separated events.

Some suppose that the disciples could not have spoken of Jesus' *coming (parousia)*.

1. Some see *parousia* as a technical concept belonging to the apostolic age after Pentecost, hence a concept too advanced for them at that stage of their maturity. But the fact that Matthew uses a later technical term does not mean the disciples could not have used a paraphrase for it at the moment, meaning precisely what the later technical term signifies for Matthew's

readers. (Cf. *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 289.)

2. While it is true, with Morgan (*Matthew*, 282) to assert that "the second advent must be prepared for fundamentally by the Cross and the Resurrection; and they had no apprehension of the Resurrection. . . . They were in revolt against the idea of the Cross and blind to the fact of the Resurrection," it does not follow that they had no conception of the Second Coming. Their mind was open to this glorious prospect. (See below.)
3. Plummer (*Matthew*, 239), too, simply misinterprets the evidence. It is not Matthew who mistakenly rewords a question the disciples did not ask, whereas Mark supposedly reports it correctly. Rather, Matthew's is the objective reporting of the more fully worded statement of the disciples' complete question. Even though it is based on wrong presuppositions, Jesus does in fact deal with it in the course of His answer, even if to correct their misunderstanding.

Jesus had already taught these men much that would lead them to formulate reasonably intelligent questions on these subjects, even if their grasp of the true connections was far from perfect. They knew He had declared that . . .

1. He would leave the earth to return to His Father (19:28; John 7:33; 8:21, 28).
2. He would come again after a long time (Luke 18:8; 19:11-15) at the close of the age (Matt. 13:40, 49) in glory (Matt. 16:27).
3. It would be to resurrect the dead and give life (John 5:28f.; 6:39, 44, 54; 11:24-26).
4. He would preside over the judgment (John 5:22, 27, 29; Luke 19:15-27; Matt. 7:21f.; 16:27; 13:41).
5. That Jesus should pronounce judgment against cities or people highly favored by their abundant opportunities and magnanimous grace of God, would not surprise the Twelve (10:15; 11:20-24; 12:36-45). So, for Him to pronounce judiciary destruction for Jerusalem and its Temple would suggest to the Twelve an immediate association with the Final Judgment concerning which he had already revealed much.
6. He had just connected Jerusalem's destruction with His own mysterious absence (23:37-39). At the Triumphal Entry He had predicted the City's death-hour in war and desolation (Luke 19:41-44).

The true problem is not: "How could the disciples to whom Christ's repeated predictions of His coming death and resurrection meant so little, . . . ask about his (second) coming?" (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 851), but, rather, how these disciples could disconnect the necessity for Jesus' death, burial and resurrection from His glorification and return to bring judgment on sinners and victory for His saints, a rule in which the Twelve themselves would share (19:28). Intellectually, they knew Jesus had spoken of His passion, but were emotionally blind to it. However, because their emotional framework welcomed His revelations of victory and future glory, they could ask questions openly about these concepts.

One reason they confused the Fall of Jerusalem for the End of the World and Jesus' coming is psychological. Bruce (*Training*, 323) observed that "local and partial judgments are wont to be thus mixed up with the universal one in men's imaginations; and hence almost every great calamity which inspires awe leads to anticipations of the last day."

Another reason for their confusion is theological. Old Testament prophecies seemed to justify the belief that the material Temple and its City would last forever. (Cf. Ps. 78:68f.; II Chron. 7:16 and Zechariah's "Jerusalem" prophecies; Zech. 1:12ff.; 2:1ff.; 8:3, 4, 22; 9:8f.; 12:3—13:1; 14:1-21.) The mistake involved in their interpretation of these prophecies lay in the assumption that God's plan cannot be realized in its fullest, truest sense in the unquestionably real but spiritual temple of God, Jesus His Son in whom all the fullness of the Deity dwelt bodily (Col. 2:9) and in His Church (Eph. 2:22). The exquisitely spiritual character of God's true dwelling place—even in the Mosaic economy (Isa. 57:15; 66:1f.)—escaped them, so they, like too many interpreters, expected a stone edifice in a material city to serve the purpose of God until the Last Day. The Twelve should not have tried to establish a close connection between the Temple's destruction, the Lord's Second Coming and the world's end. This, because He had just said, "You shall not see me until you say, Blessed . . ." (23:38f.), which establishes an indefinite interval between the desolation of Jerusalem's Temple and Jesus' own reappearance to Israel. Due to their misunderstanding, the Twelve garbled these events, whereas Jesus Himself clearly separated them.

As we shall see, it was the Lord's way, when someone approached Him with an irrelevant or badly-put question, not simply to rebuke their ignorance, but to place the question at issue in its proper perspective before answering it. (See Matt. 21, 22; cf. Luke 11:27f.;

13:23f.; 17:5f.) So, just because the disciples ask for *the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world*, does not obligate Jesus to answer their question as asked. A question wrongly framed does not force the one questioned to deal with it in that form. Rather, the question must be reformed by correcting the misconception(s) on which it is based. Concerning the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish age, the Lord will furnish two clear signs that it is about to occur. So doing, He met their basic desire to know (1) *When?* (the time); and (2) *the sign*. But when He treated His Second Coming and the end of the world (24:36—25:46), He was not at all obligated by their question to indicate ANY sign whatever of these latter events. Rather, in no uncertain terms, He will deny that any warning will be given. (See notes on 24:27, 36-39, 42, 44, 50; 25:13.) It is futile to seek such a sign in Jesus' words, merely because the disciples asked for one. Thus, the disciples' questions are no final or definitive key to interpreting Matthew 24.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. From what major event was Jesus just coming when He went out from the Temple and was going on His way?
2. What particular features of the Temple buildings captured the interest of the disciples, according to Mark and Luke?
3. Quote Jesus' reaction to the disciples' enthusiasm over the wonders of the sacred buildings.
4. Where was Jesus when He gave His answer to the disciples' questions? Why is this site significant?
5. Quote the questions His disciples formulated and explain the connection between their questions and the circumstances that gave rise to them.
6. According to Mark, who were the four disciples who sought further information about Jesus' terrible prophecy?
7. What did the disciples mean by "the end of the age"?
8. Explain the disciples' theology or view of eschatology that caused them to ask the questions they did.
9. On what other occasions had Jesus taught His disciples about the following?
  - a. The fall of Jerusalem
  - b. The Second Coming
  - c. The end of the world and its concomitant events

What predictions had He made before, which His disciples could have taken into consideration to formulate their questions about these events?

## II. THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM AND ITS TEMPLE (24:4-35)

### GENERAL WARNING AGAINST MISLEADING SIGNS NOT RELATED TO THE END (24:4-13)

TEXT: 24:4-13

(Parallels: Mark 13:5-13; Luke 21:8-19)

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man lead you astray. 5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ; and shall lead many astray. 6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled: for *these things* must needs come to pass; but the end is not yet. 7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and earthquakes in divers places. 8 But all these things are the beginning of travail. 9 Then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake. 10 And then shall many stumble, and shall deliver up one another, and shall hate one another. 11 And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray. 12 And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. 13 But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What is important about warning the disciples against being misled?
- b. How could anyone living in Jesus' generation, many of whom knew Him personally, be fooled by false Christs and led astray?
- c. What image would the claim, "I am the Christ," conjure up in the mind of the Hebrew listener? Did pretenders to this title appear in the first century?
- d. Although the events predicted would be deeply alarming, there is a certain comfort in knowing that they were certain to occur. What significant kind of comfort are these predictions calculated to inspire?

- e. Jesus said: "These things *must* come to pass." Do you think He approves of bloody revolutions, destructive earthquakes and helplessly hungry people? If not, what does He mean?
- f. Popularizers of pet theories of prophecy often point to these great world disasters as "signs of the near approaching end of the world." What are the specific phrases Jesus used in this context to convince everyone that these disasters are *not* signs of anything?
- g. Jesus affirmed that war, famine, pestilence and earthquakes are "but the beginning of sufferings." How does this help everyone form a correct concept of world history and a sound eschatology?
- h. To what kind of "tribulation" would the disciples of Jesus be delivered up? What details do Mark and Luke make specific? What kind of a Messianic Kingdom would the disciples have been expecting, if this warning is thought to be a corrective to their view?
- i. What kind of a Kingdom does Jesus represent, if only the hardest believers endure to the end and are saved?
- j. Could not Jesus have broken the bad news to His disciples more gently? What is the advantage to His followers in His using such plain speech? How would you have reacted to such a bleak outlook, if you had known what you know now about martyrdom in Church history?
- k. What does this blunt speech predicting a horrible future for the disciples tell you about Jesus as a leader? Can He be a loving Lord, if He talks like that?
- l. What does His blunt speech tell you about Jesus as a Prophet?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus began His answer to them by saying, "Watch out that no one mislead you about this. In fact, many imposters will come using my title, claiming, 'I am the Christ!' and saying, 'The time of the end is close at hand!' They will fool many people, but you must not follow their leadership.

"You will be hearing of wars going on and rumors about wars and revolutions being planned. So, when you do, do not panic or be overly alarmed. These are things that must happen first, but the end is still to come. The end will not occur immediately, because one nation will go to war with another; one kingdom will declare war on another.

“There will be severe earthquakes in various localities, as well as famines and epidemics. There will be fearful events and great portents in the skies. All this, however, is but the early pains of childbirth.

“Be on your guard, because, PREVIOUS TO ALL THIS, they will arrest you and hand you over to Sanhedrins to persecute you. You will be flogged in synagogues and cast into prison. You will be summoned to appear before governors and kings on my account. This will furnish you an opportunity to bear testimony before them. In fact, the gospel must first be proclaimed to all peoples. However, when they lead you away to hand you over, make up your minds not to worry ahead of time or meditate how to defend yourselves or what to say. When that time comes, just say what is given you, because I will provide you such eloquence and such logic that none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute you. This is because it will not merely be you doing the talking, but the Holy Spirit.

“One brother will betray another to death. A father will turn his child in to the authorities. Children will rebel against their parents. People will put some of you to death. You will be universally hated because of your allegiance to me.

“At that time many will be so stunned as to lose their faith. They will betray each other and hate one another. Numerous false prophets will come on the scene and deceive many people. Because of the spread of lawlessness, the fervency of most people’s love will cool off. However, the disciple who never gives up until it is all over is the one who will be saved. You will not suffer the slightest damage—not even a hair of your head! By standing firm under fire you will gain your lives.

## SUMMARY

Jesus warns against all misleading signs of the approaching end, such as false messiahs, wars, natural upheavals, persecutions, apostacy and indifference. However, the period will be marked by victorious gospel proclamation, even if individual Christians must personally endure great difficulties, even martyrdom.

### A. Practical Warnings Against Misleading Signs Not Related to the End

#### 1. False Christs are not the signal (24:4, 5)

24:4 **Take heed that no man lead you astray.** Jesus’ opening sentence forms the ethical and intensely practical backbone of everything

else He shall teach. His goal was not to gratify men's curiosity about the end of time, but to protect believers against deception by unscrupulous pretenders as much as by sincere, but misguided, prophecy enthusiasts. He is not interested in furnishing His people with a printed program of "Last Days Events." More practical than this, He emphasizes the attitudes they must have on ANY day, for it may be their last.

Because the disciples had connected Jerusalem's fall with Christ's return to earth, as if they were one momentous event, Jesus must first place them on their guard against deceivers who would lure people into concluding that frightening episodes surrounding the decline and fall of Israel should be interpreted as heralding the grand intervention of God. They were not to be deceived into supposing that His personal, visible Second Coming were near in the context of these events. Any rumor to the contrary must automatically be branded false. In fact, the only absolutely certain information concerning the time of His return is that it would take place when no one could expect it (24:39, 42-44, 50; 25:13). Thus, there would be no sign, no warning. Consequently, any human calculation or announcement is an attempt to *lead you astray*, or tending to that result.

In times of severe suffering, nothing is so diabolically deceptive or so productive of unreasoning illusions and of such heated debate as fanatical eschatological prejudice that spawns ungrounded, self-deceptive expectations and even enflames racial hatred. And yet the Israel of Jesus' day was impregnated with just such a volatile mixture of Messianic hope and nationalistic prejudice that, among other things, laid the groundwork for its destruction. Dana (*New Testament World*, 135ff.) lists three elements which, in the final days of Jerusalem, would explain Israel's tragic blindness and vindicate our Lord's counsel of caution. They believed . . .

1. that God would manifest a special interposition of divine power, either directly or through the Messiah.
2. that the nation of Israel would be supremely elevated and all other peoples humiliated.
3. that the absolute subjection of the world to the rule of Jahweh and of His Anointed must necessarily and deterministically eliminate human free will in order to inaugurate an era of endless righteousness where God's sovereignty could no longer be challenged.

How significant this warning today! The very events which prophecy popularizers cite today as signs of the end of the world were rejected

by our Lord as indicative of anything. Interpreters have penned volumes for centuries to point them out in their own era. But Jesus could well foresee how easily false messiahs and teachers could utilize questionable methods of exegesis to mislead disciples, not only in that age, but perpetually. Even to consider the dreadful list of natural and political upheavals as antecedents of the final death-day of the world is to be misled, because Jesus denied these are mysterious indicators of anything special in God's program.

Note how practically Jesus ministers to His followers' needs: He distracts them from an over-interest in future events, emphasizing what kind of people they must be as His servants. (Cf. Peter's method, II Peter 3:11, 14.) Even as He lets them into His secret, He puts brakes on their curiosity. He is not content to furnish them a plan for the future so they can manipulate it for their own purposes. Rather, He pushes them back to common duty and discipleship.

### Political Messianic Fanaticism

**24:5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ; and shall lead many astray.** The *name* which impostors would apply illegitimately to themselves is not "Jesus," His personal name, but *Christ*, His rightful title. There were hundreds of men in His day named "Jesus." (Cf. Col. 4:11; Acts 13:6; Luke 3:29; Matt. 27:17 margin "Jesus Barabbas.") What distinguished THIS Jesus from every other was His well-founded claim to be THE CHRIST. The unsubstantiated claim of the false messiahs was not that they were a reincarnation of Jesus of Nazareth, but that they were attempting to cash in on that title for which He was justly famous.

What special image would the claim, *I am the Christ*, have conjured up in the mind of the unbelieving Jewish community? For us, to be *the Christ* is to be that particular "Anointed of God" authorized to speak in God's Name. But for anyone who rejected Jesus' claims and clung to his own misdirected messianic fantasies, the appearance of ANYONE answering to the popular Messianic dream of an earthly, material kingship would certainly deceive and gather a massive following. Consider the much vaster multitudes Jesus could have commanded, had He but conceded to say, *I am the Christ*, in the grossly materialistic sense hoped for by His contemporaries. (Cf. John 6:14f. in contrast with 18:36; see notes on Matt. 8:4; 9:30; 12:16, 19.) Thus, Jesus warns against those who claimed His rightful

title and authority, but with totally other motivations, intentions and concepts of Messiahship.

Just how real this danger was is documented by Josephus who reports (*Ant.* XX,5,1).

Now it came to pass, that while Fadus was procurator of Judea (i.e. 44-46 A.D.), that a certain magician, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the river Jordan; *for he was a prophet*, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it; *and many were deluded by his words*. However, Fadus did not permit them to make any advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them; who falling upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them, and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, and cut off his head, and carried it to Jerusalem.

Concerning the time of Felix (A.D. 52-61; cf. Acts 24), Josephus (*Wars*, II,13,4-5) writes that Jewish affairs were gradually degenerating, not only because of terrorists who used robbery to finance their program but also because of impostors who deceived the multitude:

There was also another body of wicked men gotten together, not so impure in their actions, but more wicked in their intentions who laid waste the happy state of the city no less than did these murderers. These were such men as *deceived and deluded the people under pretense of divine inspiration*, but were for procuring innovations and changes of government; and these prevailed with the multitude to act like madmen and *went before them into the wilderness, as pretending that God would show them the signal of liberty*. But Felix thought this procedure was to be the beginning of a revolt; so he sent some horsemen and footmen, both armed, who destroyed a great number of them. But there was an Egyptian false prophet that did the Jews more mischief than the former; for he was a cheat, and *pretended to be a prophet also*, and got together thirty thousand men that were deluded by him; *these he led round about from the wilderness to the mount which is called the Mount of Olives and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force*. . . .

The Egyptian promised his victims that "he would show them from hence how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down;

and he promised them that he would procure them an entrance into the city through those walls, when they were fallen down" (*Ant.* XX,8,5-6). Felix took a dim view of this, attacked first, slaughtered four hundred of his followers and captured two hundred prisoners. But the Egyptian himself escaped! Again, in the procuratorship of Festus (A.D. 61), Josephus (*Ant.* XX,8,10; cf. *Wars*, II,13,5) documented how

Festus sent forces, both horsemen and footmen to fall upon those that had been seduced by a certain impostor, *who promised them deliverance and freedom from the miseries they were under, if they would but follow him as far as the wilderness.* Accordingly those forces that were sent destroyed both him that had deluded them and those that were his followers also.

THESE were the kind of *Christ* that made sense to the first century Jews. So, it was against this kind of false messiah that Jesus alerted His followers.

## 2. International war is not the signal (24:6, 7a)

**24:6 Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars.** In Israel's history, *wars and rumors of wars* were not always bad news, since they offered hope of freedom. (Cf. Jer. 51:45f.) However, wars of liberation were the exciting logic of misdirected, fanatic Messianism too. Remember: the first-century Palestine Liberation Organization was JEWISH. But Hebrew Christians in every part of the Roman Empire could not but be affected by the unsettling rumors that foreshadow the coming of war. So, the emotional involvement of the Christians must be defused, lest they too be swept up in the political turbulence such rumors must foment.

National upheavals were the order of the day for the entire Roman Empire. Tacitus (*Histories*, I,§2, 189) sighs dismally,

I am entering on the history of a period rich in disasters, frightful in its wars, torn by civil strife, and even in peace full of horrors. Four emperors perished by the sword. There were three civil wars; there were more with foreign enemies; there were often wars that had both characters at once. There was success in the East and disaster in the West. There were disturbances in Illyricum; Gaul wavered in its allegiance; Britain was thoroughly subdued and immediately abandoned; the tribes of the Suevi

and the Sarmatae rose in concert against us; the Dacians had the glory of inflicting as well as suffering defeat; the armies of Parthia were all but set in motion by the cheat of a counterfeit Nero.

*Rumors of war* were heard as Tiberius (A.D. 14-37) ordered Vitellius to attack Aretas of Arabia (*Ant.* XVIII,5,1-3) and started to march across Palestine with his Roman eagles. Just ten years after Jesus began His ministry, war rumors raced through Jewish cities as Caligula ordered an army to march on Jerusalem to place his statues in the Temple or massacre anyone who attempted to stop the attempt. This abomination of desolation was averted by the heroic Jewish plea at Ptolemais and at Tiberias made to the Roman commander, Petronius (*Wars*, II,10,1-5), as also by Herod Agrippa's timely intercession (*Ant.* XVIII,8,1-9).

Under Cumanus (48 A.D.), during a Passover feast a tumult in the temple cost 10,000 lives trampled to death, because of the presence of Roman soldiers in and around the Temple (*Ant.* XX,5,3; *Wars* II, 12,1). In the same period a fierce war was barely averted between Jews and Samaritans (*Wars*, II,12,3-7). Gessius Florus (65 A.D.), whose rapacious administration made his corrupt predecessors appear almost righteous by comparison (*Wars*, II,14,2), deliberately provoked the Jews to war (*Wars*, II,17,4). The eloquent Agrippa II formerly pleaded with the Jews not to declare war against Rome solely due to Florus' abuses (*Wars*, II,16). Nonetheless, Zealot agitation continued and finally forced the suspension of regular sacrifices for the Roman emperor. Since this was a direct repudiation of loyalty to Rome, it marks the true beginning of the Jewish war with Rome (*Wars*, II,17,2). From then on, it was one fierce, almost continuous, civil war between revolutionary terrorists and a determined peace party (*Wars*, IV,3,2); a war, however, wherein Jewish terrorists murdered the high priest and unarmed Romans on the Sabbath (*Wars*, II,17)! In a one-hour massacre, 20,000 Jews were butchered by their pagan fellow-citizens at Caesarea (*Wars*, II,18,1), 10,000 at Damascus died (*Wars*, II,20,2). Civil war in Scythopolis left 13,000 corpses (*Wars*, II,18,3). Anti-Jewish bloodbaths accounted for 2,500 dead in Askelon. At Ptolemais 2,000 were killed and many in Tyre. 50,000 died in Alexandria (*ibid.*, §7,8).

*Wars and rumors of wars* streamed incessantly from Rome upon the death of Nero (68 A.D.) as three emperors contended for the throne, slaying and being slain in turn: Galba, Otho and Vitellius

(68, 69 A.D.). This unsettling news of chaos at the head of the world empire would create tensions everywhere. (See *Wars* IV,9,1-2,9-10.)

**See that ye be not troubled.** In light of the historical reality meant, the disciples must have grasped with astonishment at Jesus' inconceivably calm order not to be alarmed. These conditions would try the strongest faith and determination to hold firm in the face of temptations to surrender to fear or flee prematurely before the Gospel testimony could be given, and still He expects people not to get excited or worry?!

Jack Lewis (*Matthew*, II,122) quotes *Genesis Rabbah* 42:4: "When thou seest the kingdoms fighting against one another, look and expect the foot of the Messiah." Our Master sharply repudiated this apocalyptic eschatology based on wishful thinking. Since wars are a part of the negative destiny of sinful men, Jesus is concerned that Christians not throw themselves into some ill-omened political venture under the leadership of self-styled prophets who promise messianic significance for their program.

**These things must needs come to pass.** God is not the Author of war or human disaster. The direct causes are human selfishness, greed and ambition. Nevertheless, in the purpose of God, these human ingredients, especially human free choice inspired by Satan, will be permitted free rein until Final Judgment. In such a case, *these things* compose the kind of world in which the Christian will find himself. This assurance of God's foreknowledge of world history is intended to calm the disciples' fears and induce him to reasonableness in the face of these terrors. (Cf. John 16:1ff.) By announcing God's intention to permit this frightful state of affairs to continue, Jesus aimed to debunk a Messianic utopia on earth. Jesus the true Messiah "came not to bring peace on earth . . . but a sword" and a cross (10:34-39). Thus, He diverts His follower's attention from popular Messianism to the eternal purposes of God and restores his perspective. God has in mind, not the peace of an earthly Jerusalem, but its desolation.

**But the end is not yet.** *The end* of what? That end about which the disciples had inquired, i.e. the Temple's destruction and anything else actually involved in that event. (See on 24:3.) He refers, therefore, not to the destruction of the universe, but to the end of the exclusively Jewish age, their world, not ours; the world as they had known it heretofore, not as it became thereafter. Jesus' prophetic realism stands out in sharp contrast to those of His age who embraced a view of history that promised Jewish political vindication by God. But history vindicated Jesus, not His contemporaries.

**But the end is not yet.** To appreciate Jesus' meaning, we must feel His points of emphasis, so as not to be misled by some prophecy preaching that blatantly misappropriates the very features just mentioned by Jesus, as if they were signs of His Second Coming. Ironically, such teaching unconscionably contradicts our Lord Himself. Here is what HE said:

1. "Do not go after them (the deceivers)" (Luke 21:8).
2. "See that you are not alarmed; for this must first take place, but the end will not be at once" (Matt. 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9).
3. "All this is but the beginning of sufferings" (Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8b).
4. "But before all this they will lay their hands on you . . ." (Luke 21:12).
5. "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (Mark 13:10; cf. Matt. 24:14).
6. "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14).
7. "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near" (Luke 21:20).
8. "This generation will not pass away till all these things take place" (Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32).
9. No signs will precede the Second Coming to give warning to anyone (24:37—25:30).

There is no intention here to say that wars, famines and pestilences on earth and horrors in space have only occurred in the past or shall not do so in the future. Rather, what is acid-clear is that Jesus emphatically denies that these are prophetic indicators that His Second Coming is imminent. This harmonizes with His equally emphatic declarations that deal directly with this subject (24:42-44; Mark 13:33, 35; Luke 21:34; Matt. 24:50; 25:13).

**24:7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.** *For:* his verse explains the foregoing assertion on "wars and rumors of wars." Note His parallelisms:

6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars.  
See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.

7 For nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.  
All this is but the beginning of the sufferings.

Amplifying His thought in language reminiscent of II Chronicles 15:6 and Isaiah 19:2, Jesus not only depicts the human distress of wartorn countries, but prepares those, who recognize these allusions to Old Testament language and situations, for His later revelation of the coming divine judgment on Israel.

### 3. Disturbances in nature are not the signal (24:7b, 8)

Next, He names the awful fruits of war: *there shall be famines* and "pestilences" (Luke 21:11). In wartime, uncertain living and working conditions hinder the normal production and marketing of food, leading to shortages and *famines*. These lead to uneven diets, vitamin deficiencies and sickness. Where normal hygiene is interrupted by civil chaos, pestilences fester and spread.

One famine occurred during the reign of Claudius when Fadus was procurator (45:46 A.D. See *Ant.* III,15,3.). Queen Helena of Adiabene bought corn in Egypt and a cargo of dried figs from Cyprus at great expense and distributed it in Judea. Her proselyte son, Isates, furnished money to Jerusalem's leaders too (*Ant.* XX,2,1-5). This is the same famine predicted by Agabus, for which the Christians sent disaster relief (Acts 11:28f.). Other historians characterize the reign of Claudius as a period hard-hit by famine conditions, one famine in Greece, mentioned by Eusebius, and two in Rome, according to Dion Cassius and Tacitus (*Annals*, XII 43; *Expositor's Greek Testament*, II,270).

Not only would crops fail, but the earth itself would seem out of joint with itself: *earthquakes in divers places*: here, there, anywhere, not more specifically located. Just a few years after the Church began, the Mediterranean world was rocked by disturbances in nature and terrors in the supernatural realm (Luke 21:11). "There will be terrors and great signs from heaven." Alford (I,236) listed five principle *earthquakes* within the period 46-63 A.D. Tacitus (*Annals*, XII, 43) describes 51 A.D. as one such ill-omened year:

Several prodigies occurred that year. Birds of evil omen perched on the Capitol; houses were thrown down by frequent shocks of earthquake, and as the panic spread, all the weak were trodden down in the hurry and confusion of the crowd. Scanty crops too, and consequent famine were regarded as a token of calamity.

Concerning the year 62 A.D. Tacitus wrote (XV,22):

During the same consulship a gymnasium was wholly consumed by a stroke of lightning, and a statue of Nero within it was melted down to a shapeless mass of bronze. An earthquake too demolished a large part of Pompeii, a populous town in Campania.

Near the end of 65 or 66 he relates (XV,47):

At the close of the year people talked much about prodigies, presaging impending evils. Never was lightning flashes more frequent, and a comet too appeared, for which Nero always made propitiation with noble blood.

According to Tacitus (XVI,13), the years 65 and 66 encompassed much that chills the blood:

A year of shame and of so many evil deeds heaven was also marked by storms and pestilence. Campania was devastated by a hurricane, which destroyed everywhere country houses, plantations and crops, and carried its fury to the neighborhood of Rome, where a terrible plague was sweeping away all classes of human beings without any derangement of the atmosphere as to be visibly apparent.

Earlier (*Histories*, I,2), Tacitus had written:

Now too Italy was prostrated by disasters either entirely novel, or that recurred only after a long succession of ages; cities in Campania's richest plains were swallowed up and overwhelmed; Rome was wasted by conflagrations, its oldest temples consumed, and the Capitol was fired by the hands of citizens. Sacred rites were profaned; there was profligacy in the highest ranks; the sea was crowded with exiles, and its rocks polluted with bloody deeds.

Josephus (*Wars*, IV,4,5) recounts that when an army of Idumeans, sent for by the Zealots, arrived at Jerusalem, they were shut out of the city by Ananus the high priest. That night over Jerusalem broke a terribly violent storm of "strong winds with the largest showers of rain and continual lightnings, terrible thunderings and amazing concussions and the bellowing of the earth, that was in an earthquake." Note Josephus' personal deduction:

These things were a manifest indication that some destruction was coming upon men, when the system of the world was put into this disorder; and any one would guess that these wonders foreshowed some great calamities were coming.

Josephus' personal opinion is remarkable, because it is precisely the sort of guesswork that Jesus warns His followers against: such disasters must not be considered a critical sign of anything special in the plan of God. Close attention is not to be dedicated to these physical disturbances in nature that understandably capture the imagination and demand some theory of their cause. However great and fearful they be, they are emphatically NOT the heaven-sent signal.

24:8 **But all these things are the beginning of travail.** This statement completes Jesus' parenthetical amplification of verse 6 begun in verse 7, and is parallel to the last half of verse 6. The basic message of these verses is, whatever you do, **DO NOT CONSIDER THESE DISASTERS AS SIGNS OF ANYTHING!** They are not indications of the end, but of *the beginning!* He would rescue His people from that apocalyptic's eschatological fever that fondly and confidently points to wars and natural catastrophes as unequivocal cues to the end of the age. These are to be seen, instead, as just so many episodes in the common history of man.

*Travail* (*ōdinōn*, pangs of childbirth, birth-pangs), according to some, suggests that, because birth-throes lead to the birth of a child, therefore the *travail* in question here must lead to a happy outcome, i.e. His return in victory over the world. Several responses are possible.

1. Granted that the birth of a child follows the *travail*, it does not follow that the happy event here (supposedly) intended is the Second Coming or Judgment. Rather, the almost unbearable calamities pictured here could be the birthpangs of the new epoch in God's dealing with man. And, contrary to Jewish expectations, the new era dawning would not be characteristically Jewish or limited to Hebrew rites and customs, but truly universal, a Kingdom of God open to all men, not Mosaic but Christian. Lenski (*Matthew*, 931) believes that "Jesus adopts the term which was used by the rabbis to designate the sufferings and woes which they thought were to precede the Messiah's coming: *cheble hammashiach*, *dolores Messiae*. All these tribulations would bring forth the new era." If He deliberately utilized this language common to earlier Jewish thought (cf. *Jubilees* 23:18-24; *IV Ezra* 5:1-12; 6:14-24;

8:63—9:12; *Sibyl. Orac.* III, 796-807; *II Baruch* chaps. 27-30; 70-72), it would be to correct its mistaken notions. The era to follow this *travail* would not glorify national Israel nor justify popular concepts thereof, but offer hope and blessing to all the world through the proclamation of the Gospel by a truly universal Church. Could the *travail* signal the dawn of "the regeneration" (*palingenesis*) of 19:28, when the Apostles' reign with Christ would occur, i.e. during the Kingdom, now?

2. However suggestive the foregoing theory may be, the element of PAIN stands foremost in Jesus' mind, as everything He says next will show, especially in Mark 13:9ff. and Luke 21:12ff. *Travail*, here, foreshadows those more severe troubles that excite horror preliminary to the full maturing of the catastrophe. *Odñes (travail)* may be utilized for the pains of death, without implying passage to a happier life by birth. (Cf. Acts 2:24; Ps. 18:5 [LXX 17:6; 116:3 [LXX 114:3]; see also Luke 2:48 *odunòmenoi*.)

Because *these things are the beginning*, Jesus would forestall the error that the Second Coming should be expected early in the first century. In the same way He warns that the breaking up of the Jewish State must await the maturing of events. *These things are the beginning*; the rest He proceeds to sketch in detail clear down to verse 13 (see also parallels), moving from the general to the specific, from general world conditions to the specific situation, life and problems of the Church. Immediately on the heels of His exposure of the false alarms, Jesus proceeds to sound a warning that was to be more personal, more directly related to the early Christians than the preceding perils. With the ax of confident prediction and with His call to trust His word on good evidence, He effectively severs the roots of fears that could cloud men's minds, especially of those very people upon whom the propagation of His Gospel would depend. This quiet, steady faith and witnessing, not fear of world events, is to be their main concern. Thus, Jesus set the gyro-compass that would hold the Church steady and on course, flying into the teeth of the devil's worst.

#### 4. Troubles inside the Church and out are not the signal (24:9-13)

##### a. Persecution of the Church (24:9)

24:9 **Then**, as a word in this context, is ambiguous, in that it has two meanings:

1. "At that time," i.e. during the period just described;
2. "Thereupon," next in order of events or time, because "very often in Matthew *tôte* represents the Hebrew *wâw* consecutive, and is thus simply continuing the narrative" (Souter, *Pocket Lexicon*, 263).

However, if taken in this second sense, Matthew would appear to contradict Luke, as Matthew seems to affirm that the tribulation suffered by Christians would follow the alarming world events, whereas Luke has "But *before* all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you . . ." (Luke 21:12). However, as pointed out at 24:7, Matthew's verses 7 and 8 are amplificatory in that they furnish further information concerning His prediction of wars and their sociological and economic results. Now in verse 9 Jesus returns to His original outline which had been interrupted by that parenthetical explanation and takes up the next characteristic of that same troubled time, persecution of the Christians. This, as Luke says, shall occur prior to the end of the epoch torn by mind-boggling tragedies. So, Luke's "before all these things" aims only at greater chronological precision without controverting His colleagues, Matthew and Mark who merely identify the character of the period without establishing a tight chronology. So, the first definition of *then* is preferable: "during the time just described, then, in those days."

### The Choice Between Death and Loyalty to Jesus

**They shall deliver you up to tribulation, and shall kill you.** Here Matthew briefly summarizes material that Mark and Luke record in considerable detail (Mark 13:9-13 = Luke 21:12-19). These warnings addressed to the disciples concerning their future labors include information our Apostle had already recorded in his version of their ordination sermon. (See on Matt. 10:16-22.) This is not new revelation. Rather, it clarifies to what period Jesus' earlier words actually apply, i.e. to those years just before the Jewish war with Rome. (See Introductory Notes on Matthew 10, Vol. II, 248-255.)

*Tribulation (thlipsis)* is pressure, hence the suffering caused by pressure: persecution, affliction, distress. Here the pressure is the persecution of Christians who suffer because of their devotion of Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah. This cannot be a general expression for, or type of, the "great tribulation" mentioned in 24:21, because

there the malevolence is directed at unbelieving Jews, not Christians. (This does not deny attribution of this phrase "great tribulation" in Rev. 7:14 to Christian suffering, which may well include some of the wretchedness indicated here in 24:9.) As the Jews are to have their "great tribulation," so the Christians are to be subjected to tremendous pressures which find their origin in the clash that must come when the believers' new allegiance, his new norms and his wholly new world-view clash with those of everyone and everything else that finds itself in diametric opposition to all that Christ stands for. This *tribulation* would be characterized in various ways:

1. JEWISH PERSECUTION. Jesus refers to a time when the Church was considered a Jewish sect and prosecutable as such by Jewish authorities ("synagogues and councils" cf. Acts 22:19). It was also a time when the Jews themselves did not possess the authority to prosecute capital crimes, hence their accused must "be brought before governors and kings" for judgment (Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12). The fulfilment of Jesus' prediction is documented in pain and blood. (Acts 4:3-7; 5:18; 8:1-4; 11:19; 12:1ff.; 13:50; 14:5; 28:22; II Cor. 6:4-10; 4:7-12; 8:2; 11:23-29; I Thess. 2:14-16; II Thess. 1:4; II Tim. 3:12; Heb. 10:32ff.; Rev. 2:9ff.; 3:9f.) No less than Stephen, James, the Apostle, and James the Lord's brother were executed or assassinated before 70 A.D. (Acts 7; 12:1ff.; *Ant.* XX,9,1; Eusebius, *Eccl. History* II,23-25.)
2. FAMILY HATRED TOWARD CHRISTIANS (Mark 13:12; Luke 21:16; cf. Matt. 10:21). Terrible persecutions are in store not merely as torture for the body, but also those crushing torments of the heart when one's own family and friends turn against him. Pagan family members feel betrayed by the conversion of one of their own, but this is acutely felt among Jewish families. Tragically, such hatred was not even entirely anti-Christian sentiment. The entire nation would be torn by internecine strife that became virtually a civil war, ripping apart even private families (*Wars*, IV,3,2). Such betrayals were typical of the closing years of the Jewish war.
3. UNIVERSAL HATRED FOR CHRISTIANS. (Cf. 12:22.) *Ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake*. Not only hounded and branded by antagonists of their own race (Acts 28:22), early Hebrew Christians would be subjected to pagan molestations wherever the Gospel advanced. *All nations* confidently envisions the Great Commission (28:19) as a foregone conclusion: Christ's victorious influence is assured, even in the face of seeming defeat!

One sample of these ordeals occurred when Nero burned Rome, leaving many citizens burned to death. Read Tacitus (*Annals* XV, 44) whose own antipathy toward Christians is ill-disguised. Schaff (*History of the Christian Church*, I,381) summarizes the Roman historian's documentation of Nero's attack on Christians:

Their Jewish origin, their indifference to politics and public affairs, their abhorrence of heathen customs, were construed into an *odium generis humani* ("hated against mankind") and this made an attempt on their part to destroy the city sufficiently plausible to justify a verdict of guilty.

Tacitus reports a vast multitude of Christians that died in the Neronian persecution of 64 A.D. It was for this that Peter prepared his readers (I Peter 1:6; 2:12; 3:13-18; 4:12-19; 5:10; cf. Rev. 6:9f.; 7:14). Later, the apostles, Peter and Paul, experienced death as martyrs.

But these tribulations must be suffered *for my name's sake*, i.e. for all that Jesus stands for as this is revealed in His message. But it must be for Jesus, not our own pride, ignorance or folly, that we suffer (5:11f.; 10:22, 32f.; I Peter 4:14ff.). However painful these tortures might be, none of these tribulations mean the end of history for the Christians, because the disciple trusts Jesus to conquer.

#### b. Religious confusion and widespread faithlessness

(24:10-12)

4. APOSTASY AND BETRAYAL. 24:10 **And then shall many stumble, and shall deliver one another, and shall hate one another. Then,** see on v. 9. Here is a practical warning; times of suffering produce quite opposite effects! While undergirding the hope and determination of some, such times weaken and break others. Jesus predicts a gradual but serious deterioration in Christian faith and practice.
- a. *Many shall stumble* (*skandalisthésontai*, lit. "be entrapped," see notes on 18:6f.). True to His understanding of human psychology which He expressed in the Parable of the Soils (13:3-9, 18-23), the Lord discerns how many will be entrapped by their (often unconscious) lingering attachments to the world. They will walk right into the trap, because they desire the bait! (Cf. James 1:14; contrast II Peter 1:4!) Others, seeing that God fails to

act decisively by setting up His Kingdom on earth, are shocked and quit. Christ delays His coming, so still others drop their discipleship and turn apostates. Pliny, governor of Bythnia (c. 109-111 A.D.), described in his letter to Trajan (*Ep. X,97*) some former Christians who willingly repeated after him

. . . an invocation to the gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense to Caesar's image . . . together with those of the gods, and who finally cursed Christ, none of which acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing. . . . Others who were named by that informer *at first confessed themselves Christians, and then denied it; true, they had been of that persuasion but they had quitted it*, some three years, some many years, and a few as much as twenty-five years ago. They all worshiped your statue and the images of the gods, and cursed Christ.

b. *Many shall deliver up one another.* This they did in different ways:

- (1) An apostate, by virtue of his inside information and former connections as well as by his abandonment of Christianity, psychologically motivated to turn over to the authorities those whom he has abandoned. Sometimes he could diminish his personal torture by turning traitor to expose his former fellow-Christians.
- (2) Warring Christian sects might justify to themselves the betrayal of those whom they refuse to recognize as Christian brethren. (Cf. Phil. 1:15-18.)
- (3) Tacitus (*Annals*, XV,44) recorded that such betrayals occurred: "Several Christians at first were apprehended, and then, *by their discovery*, a multitude of others were convicted and cruelly put to death, with derision and insult."

c. *Many shall hate one another.* *Hate* is a cover-word Jesus utilized to express, for example, the jealousy and suspicion that animated the "false brethren" who endangered Paul's ministry (II Cor. 11:26), allured converts away from the truth (Gal. 1:6-9; 2:4; 3:1; 4:16ff.; 5:7-12; 6:12) and attempted to discredit him (II Cor. 10:1f., 10; chap. 11).

5. FALSE TEACHERS: 24:11 **And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray.** That false teachers and doctrine abounded even in the apostolic age before Jerusalem's fall is amply attested

by New Testament illustrations and warnings: 7:15ff.; Acts 20:29f.; Rom. 3:8; 16:17f.; I Cor. 15:12; II Cor. 11:1—13:10; Gal. 1:6-9 etc., I Tim. 1:3-7, 19f.; II Tim. 2:17f.; 3:8f.; Tit. 1:10-16; II Peter 2:1; I John 2:18-26; 4:1, 3; II John 7; all of Jude. *False prophets* and teachers would be harder to deal with than overt persecution from outside the Church, because these arose within the ranks of the believers. Motivated by personal animosities, selfish ambition and erroneous convictions, these schismatics would allure earnest disciples to swerve from truth in order to follow their teachers.

*History of the Christian Church*, Schaff (*ibid.*, I, 564ff.) distinguishes three types of heretical perversions of the Christian message in the first century: the Judaizing tendency, the paganizing tendency of the Gnostics, and the syncretistic tendency to blend Christianity with pagan thought. Each arose as a caricature, respectively, of Jewish Christianity, Gentile Christianity and of the truly universal Christianity that reconciled the genius and truth of both these conceptions.

In every age we must beware of even one, single false notion that distorts Christ's teaching. Every heresy has a grain of truth that renders its error palatable to the uncritical. Do not think that a *false prophet* is exclusively someone who twists the entire body of Christian doctrine or who never says something true.

6. WIDESPREAD FAITHLESSNESS. 24:12 **And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold.** *Iniquity* (*anomia*; lit. "lawlessness") expresses itself in rebellion against restraints of any kind whether inside the Church or without. The first step in Gospel proclamation is the often painful awakening of man's consciousness of his guilt. Preaching this unwelcome truth invites rejection by the majority that refuses it, dampening enthusiasm for righteousness. Further, when the hypocrisy of some insincere Christians is discovered, the sincerity of the honest ones becomes suspect. Disciples become mutually suspicious and dare no longer believe in each other. The unfortunate, natural consequence is the cooling in the intensity of their love for one another. The custom of abandoning the common Christian assembly was already growing in the first century, making mutual encouragement vital even then (Heb. 10:25).

Although He means essentially the same thing, Jesus did not say, "The *faith* of the many shall grow cold," but *The love*. . .

Here is the real distinction between a shallow, formalistic faith and one that is deeply felt, real and living. Is your faith a love that siezes the imagination, warms the heart, informs the intellect, reinforces the conscience, empowers the will, causing you to love God and people as Jesus did? The kind of love Jesus has in mind is the true definition of "spirituality," not, as some hold, the abstinence from a certain list of "worldly" pleasures. This fervor will show itself in earnest, active, brotherly concern for one's fellows (25:34-40; I Peter 1:22; 2:17; 4:8; 5:14).

Does this *lawlessness (anomia)* forepicture that libertinism or antinomianism that began cropping up in early Christianity by "turning the grace of God into lasciviousness"? (Cf. Jude 4; Rom. 3:7f.; 6:1—7:6; II Peter 2:1ff.) Further, laxity in doctrine cannot help but involve moral laxity. What one believes does affect how he acts, since the same authority governs both doctrinal correctness and moral practice.

### c. Individual perseverance one's only hope (24:13)

7. INDIVIDUAL PERSEVERANCE. 24:13 **But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.** Potentially, Jesus' subtle proverb embraces an (perhaps deliberate?) ambiguity: two ends and two salvations: (1) the salvation of the individual's soul at the conclusion of his life of faithfulness, either at his death or at the world's end, whichever comes first, and (2) the preservation of the Christian's physical life at *the end* of Jerusalem.

It may be objected that Jesus cannot have three separate ends in view contemporaneously: (1) life; (2) Jerusalem; (3) the world. Further, could the salvation promised be so ambiguous as potentially to involve both physical liberation from the destiny of Jerusalem and spiritual salvation from sin and death contemporaneously? What, too, of those disciples who died a natural death or were martyred for Christ before Jerusalem's fall? Surely, early martyrs would not be lost merely because they died before 70 A.D. Would it not also be a senseless truism to argue that the life would be spared of him who endured to the end of his life? So, it is argued that He means, not Jerusalem's end, but only the believer's death, hence the salvation involved is entirely spiritual.

However, since the believer's salvation at the conclusion of his life of obedience and the early Jewish Christian's physical preservation beyond the death of Jerusalem are both true to the context,

must we choose between them? In the near context (24:9), Jesus had predicted martyrdom for some of His people. (Cf. Luke 21:16.) In this case, those who died would have *endured to the end* of their life testimony for Christ and so would *be saved* spiritually. Earlier, Jesus linked fearless testimony during persecution with spiritual salvation and with being acknowledged before the Father (10:32f.). Those who, under fire, denied their faith in Him would not be recognized as His and they would be lost spiritually, even though they live to a ripe old age and die in bed.

Nonetheless, because the Lord proceeds immediately to describe how Christians could avoid the holocaust destined for Jerusalem, it is also conceivable that, for a large sector of the early Church, *the end* and the *being saved* would vitally concern their own earth-life quite as really as that to come. *The end* is the same referred to by the expression, "these things" (24:3, 34 and parallels) and "those days" (24:19, 22 and par.), i.e. the period when Israel would be ruined nationally. It is the same *end* heralded by the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the whole world for a testimony (24:14). Accordingly, the salvation intended refers also to physical escape by precipitate flight to the mountains when Jerusalem would have been surrounded by enemy troops (Luke 21:20f.). By believing Jesus to the very last, the believer would escape the doom of the city. Even if some individuals would be martyred, the Church as a whole would elude the bloody end scheduled for the unbelieving Jewish people.

Here, then, is His justification for deliberately speaking ambiguously: "The person who believes that I know what I am talking about and trusts me right on past the complete fulfilment of these predictions, is the person who will really save his life. Life—both temporal and eternal—will not be the conquest of the wayward doubter who casts in his lot with the unbelieving and the fearful of this nation for whom God has prepared the furious punishment I describe." So, to learn to trust Jesus in the midst of fire and cruel tests of endurance would provide a double benefit for those Christians yet living in Palestine during the last hours of Israel's national existence. Their lives would be spared and their souls saved. In those crude, brutal days when human flesh was cheap and the skin of a Christian was worth nothing, many believers would doubt that they could endure. In fact, *he that endures to the end* is really what will be left of the Church after the defections, the

betrayals and apostacies, no less than the staunch believer who outlives the Palestinean tribulation! Hence, the Lord holds out concrete hope for those embattled saints, motivating them to hold firm in holding off false teachers, enduring taunts and keeping enthusiastic for Jesus, even while their entire country was flying apart.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Quote the various expressions Jesus used to indicate that disturbing world and local events were not to be considered signals of the approaching end.
2. List the various events that are not to be interpreted as signalling anything special in God's plan, but must be considered as merely the beginning of sufferings.
3. Does history record the appearance of pretenders who claimed, "I am Christ?" What would "Christ" have meant to the Jew who did not believe in Jesus?
4. List some of the "wars and rumors of wars" that characterized the period prior to 70 A.D.
5. What must the disciples' attitude be toward the world-shaking events surrounding them?
6. Explain how Jesus means the expression, "this must take place": has the purpose of God foreseen or planned wars and tumults? In what sense *must* they take place?
7. According to Mark and Luke, what is the tribulation into which men would deliver Jesus' disciples? In what chapter of Matthew has Jesus already described these troubles before?
8. What other characteristics of the period are listed exclusively in Matthew?
9. According to Jesus, what is the beginning point of this period and what the end point?

### DOES 24:4-14 SURVEY CHRISTIAN HISTORY TO THE WORLD'S END?

Some would not confine their interpretation of 24:4-14 to a specially Jewish situation or era limited to the decline and fall of the Jewish state. Rather, say they, these verses depict the chief features of the Christian era down to its end. Even if they involve the nearer history of the great catastrophe of 66-70 A.D., they project a decisive, prophetic

shadow on the farther future end, as a sign or foretaste of that chain of events from the time of the Church to the final event that summarizes them all in Christ's Return. What happens to Jerusalem is seen as typical of general human conduct. Hence, the events preceding the Jerusalem debacle are to be conceived of as signs typical of the final world disaster. Is this analysis correct? Farrar (*Life of Christ*, 544) argues,

As we learn from many other passages of Scripture, these signs, as they did usher in the destruction of Jerusalem, so shall re-appear on a larger scale before the end of all things is at hand. (See I Thess. 5:3; II Thess. 2:2, etc.)

However, the conviction that the end is at hand on the basis of other texts which mention world conditions similar to those mentioned in 24:4-14 does not require us to consider this paragraph as general or capable of referring both to Jerusalem's end and to that of the world as well. Similarity suggests, but does not prove, identity.

Further, while it is true that spiritual decline, international war, political intrigue and world catastrophes may characterize the Christian dispensation with increasing intensity right down to the end, this does not permit us to dismiss lightly the four decades between Jesus' prophecy and its fulfillment in that period.

The disciples' expression, "the sign of your coming and of the end of the world," (24:3) does not justify the unfounded conclusions drawn from this chapter, since their question was wrongly framed and needed correction before it could be properly answered. What many interpreters mistake for *signs* of the end in 24:4-14, Jesus flatly terms a mistaken clue about which nothing at all should be made. Rather, *the painful commonness of such phenomena proves they could never constitute a sign in the normal, specialized sense of the word.*

## B. Specific, True Information About Jerusalem's Destruction (24:14-28)

TEXT: 24:14-28

(Parallels: Mark 13:14-20; Luke 21:20-24)

14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations and then shall the end come.

15 When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), 16 then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains: 17 let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out the things that are in his house: 18 and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak. 19 But woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! 20 And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath: 21 for then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. 23 Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ, or, Here; believe *it* not. 24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 25 Behold, I have told you beforehand. 26 If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; go not forth: Behold, he is in the inner chambers; believe *it* not. 27 For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man. 28 Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. On what basis can a great Teacher, who is about to be brutalized and crucified by His religious competitors, assert so confidently that "this gospel that I teach you shall be preached in the whole world"? Wishful thinking and ungrounded optimism?
- b. Did Jesus assert that the entire earth would have been evangelized, i.e. every single human being would have heard the gospel before the end should come? Further, shall all be converted?
- c. How could the proclamation of the Kingdom Gospel to every nation become a signal of the near approach of the end of the period in question? Could every Christian in first-century Palestine, without the benefit of mass communications, have known about the world-wide outreach of the Gospel, and recognized therein the proof that the end was nearing? What evidences does the New Testament give to prove that Christians everywhere indeed **COULD** have known this?
- d. Why do you think Matthew (or Jesus) resorted to a form of code to render the specific, true signal that Jerusalem was about to fall,

- warning believers to flee from it? What would this Jewish double-talk tell us about the date of the final form of Matthew's manuscript? After all, Luke (21:20) decodifies the "desolating sacrilege" phrase to mean, "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies." If Matthew wrote long after the fall of Jerusalem, would he have needed to point out to the reader ("let the reader understand") that there is something about "the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel" that is not to be understood literally, but to be taken symbolically?
- e. What is so important about the detailed escape instructions Jesus gave? What would the people concerned have been tempted to do, had He not given precisely this information?
  - f. How does the detailed escape information help us to determine the historic period to which Jesus refers? That is, when Jesus shall come again to take His own with Him, would it be essential, for example, for those who are in Judea to flee to the mountains? Why not just go with Jesus in heaven instead? And what about pregnant women or nursing mothers: do they need flight certification to be "caught up in the air"? (I Thess. 4:17). Or is He even talking about the Second Coming?
  - g. Why does Jesus direct His disciples to flee "to the mountains"? Would not escape to the desert accomplish the same thing? If not, why not?
  - h. Why do you think Jesus delayed the judgment of Israel until the Kingdom Gospel could be proclaimed everywhere? Who would benefit from this delay?
  - i. What must have been the force of the evidence, which this chapter furnishes of Jesus' divine foreknowledge, upon the minds of those who stood in the midst of the earth-shaking events themselves with Matthew's Gospel open before them?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"Further, this good news about God's Kingdom will be proclaimed all over the entire inhabited earth as a witness to all nations. THEN shall the end come. So, when you see 'the desolating sacrilege' (spoken of by the prophet Daniel) standing 'in the holy place' where it does not belong,—let the reader understand that this means 'when you see Jerusalem surrounded by camps of enemy armies'—then recognize that its devastation is about to take place.

“At that time those who live in Judea must take refuge in the mountains. Those who are inside the city of Jerusalem must get out. Anyone who is up on the rooftop terrace must not take time to go down into his house to get things out of it. Those who are in the country districts or out in the fields must not enter the city or return back to pick up even an overcoat! Those will be ‘days of vengeance’ that make all that the Scriptures said come true. How dreadful for expectant mothers and for those nursing a baby during that time! Pray that you do not have to escape in the wintertime or on a Sabbath, because there will be such great ‘tribulation’ and such severe misery in the land and such fury unleashed on this people ‘that it has been unequalled since God created the world until now,’ and is never to be repeated again. Further, if the Lord had not abbreviated those days, nobody could survive. However, for the sake of God’s special people, He will put a limit on those days. People will either be killed outright with the sword or deported as prisoners of war into other countries. ‘Jerusalem will be trampled on by the pagans’ until ‘the times of the pagans’ be completed.

“At that time, if someone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ you must not believe it. This is because false christs and false prophets will make their appearance, performing great confirmatory signs and wonderful deeds so that, wherever possible, even God’s special people could be deceived by them. So, be on your guard, because I am warning you about everything in advance. So, if anyone tells you, ‘Look, he is out in the wilds,’ do not go out there. Or, if they say, ‘Look, he is hiding in some secret place,’ you dare not believe it. The Second Coming of the Messiah will be as obvious as lightning when it lights up the whole sky from east to west! Wherever the carcass is, there the vultures will flock!”

## SUMMARY

The true signal of Jerusalem’s impending doom is the appearance of an enemy army at its gates. The only safety is in undelayed escape because of the greatness of the disaster that is to occur shortly thereafter. False hopes of the Messiah’s personal coming during the siege must be unswervingly ignored, because Jerusalem must be destroyed. On the other hand, when Christ really returns, He will need no prophets to herald His coming, because it will be so evident to everyone that none could ever miss it.

## NOTES

1. The true signals of the nearness of Jerusalem's fall (24:14ff.)
  - a. Worldwide Gospel proclamation signals the approximate approach of the end (24:14)

24:14 **And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come.** *Shall be preached:* this simple future quietly but confidently predicts the triumph of the Crucified in that His message would enjoy a world-wide hearing. Note how deliberately our Lord turns His disciples' attention away from the soul-crippling dangers to occur during what would appear to them to be the climax of a great eschatological event. In the midst of a world coming apart, the Christians' main concern was to be their dedication to proclaiming Christ's Gospel throughout the whole world. Persecution could not defeat the Gospel. Irrepressibly vocal witnesses of Christ would flee from one city or country to another, reaching otherwise inaccessible audiences. Victory is assured: nothing can stop the program of God. In fact, *the end shall not come until His testimony is given to all nations!* It is entirely appropriate that Jerusalem and its Temple, the heart and home of the Mosaic era, not be eliminated until the Church, the new Israel of God, had been well established throughout the Roman Empire. When the Gospel shall have triumphed, the curtain can fall: what soul-stirring encouragement!

This highly significant verse interprets truly the mission of the early disciples. Rather than sit around idly waiting for Jerusalem to fall, as if their life could be lived in a vacuum, they were to accept the meaningful challenge to evangelize the world. Out of this we too may understand that our participation in Christian eschatology is not a question of merely gazing at heaven and waiting for Jesus to return. This moment is the hour to commit ourselves wholly, not to an obsession with prophecies of the end, but to the world mission of the Church and to our present opportunities to preach the Gospel to every creature!

*The end* in question is still "the end of the age" concerning which the Apostles had asked on the basis of Jesus' prediction of the Temple's destruction (24:2f.). Further indication of the specific period in which *the end* in question *shall come* is derived from the Marcan parallel which more precisely delimits the era in which *this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached*. As noted at Matthew 10:17-22 which contains

material identical to Mark and Luke's parallel paragraphs (Mark 13:9-13 = Luke 21:12-19), the period in question is to be characterized by the special, divine guidance and miraculous power of the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:11). This is not the usual indwelling of the Spirit promised every Christian, but that special inspiration to speak infallibly for God, granted to those on whom the Spirit's power was poured out. Hence, this occurred within the lifetime of the Apostles to whom Jesus was talking, i.e. during the period between Pentecost and the death of the last of those on whom they laid their hands. (Cf. Acts 8:17ff.) Jesus is not discussing some future *end* to occur some 2000 years or more after the first century. Further, the immediate context discusses escape from Jerusalem, hence is related to that event.

Logically, however, this verse belongs to the paragraph which follows it, as it furnishes the sign of the approximate approach of the end of the time in question. While some pronounce it impossible to know when this worldwide Gospel testimony would be complete, the New Testament writers speak otherwise:

1. The first Gospel proclamation ever given was sounded forth to "God-fearing Jews from *every nation under heaven*" (Acts 2:5). This laid appropriate groundwork for the potential fulfilment of Jesus' prediction.
2. The very existence of our New Testament Epistles, addressed to widely separated congregations, attest the presence of important Christian centers around the Mediterranean world. Further, there lived a generation of non-Apostolic men, who lived in widely scattered parts of the Roman Empire shortly after, if not contemporary with, the Apostles, who also testify to the existence and wide-acceptance of our Apostolic Epistles.
3. Romans 10:18. Although the words cited from Psalm 19:4 referred originally to God's revelations in nature, Paul legitimately borrowed the poetic expression to picture the wide diffusion of the Gospel among the Diaspora. In fact, he had already affirmed that the faith believed by the Roman Christians "is proclaimed in all the world" (Rom. 1:8).
4. In a letter dated between 59 and 63 A.D. Paul announced that the Gospel had already been "proclaimed to every creature under heaven" and that "all over the world this gospel is producing fruit and growing" (Col. 1:6, 23). Paul does not say "it IS BEING proclaimed" (*toû kêrûssoménou*), but "it HAS BEEN preached (*toû kêruchthéntos en pàsē ktîsei hupò tôn ouranòn*). His wording is too clear for misconception: Jesus' goal has been reached in

Paul's day. (Cf. "Preach the Gospel to every creature" *kēruxate tò euangélion pásē tē ktìsei*, Mark 16:15, with Paul's above-cited language in Colossians. The obedience matches the order!)

Care must be exercised in defining the extent of Jesus' meaning here. While, to us, *in the whole world* and *unto all the nations*, as phrases, have a ring of absolute universality about them, this would not necessarily have been so for Jesus nor for His first century hearers. *The whole world* (*hòlē tē oikouménē*) need not include much more than *all the nations* involved in the Roman empire. (Cf. *oikouménē* in Luke 2:1.) Josephus (*Ant.* XV,11,1; XIX,2,4; 3, 1), quoting Romans and Herod the Great, asserts that *all the inhabitable world* is subject to Rome.

Just as God had not left Himself without a providential witness of all His goodness and care for all the nations (cf. Acts 14:15-17), a witness which many misinterpreted or rejected (cf. Rom. 1:18-32; 2:4), so now the Gospel *witness* is to be offered *to all the nations* on the same "take-it-or-leave-it" basis. Nothing is here affirmed of the mass conversion of any nation, much less, of all. Just as the healed leper's presenting himself to the priests must serve *for a testimony to them*, whether they were ever convinced of Jesus' authority or not (8:4), just so would the persecuted Christians stand before governors and kings *for a testimony to them* and *to the nations* (10:18) with no guarantee that these would be converted. The Greek phrase (*eis martùrion autoís*) is the same in both texts as here (24:14). This witness aims to furnish everyone a solid basis for believing the Gospel and acting on it with confidence. However, where its well-grounded evidence is scorned, the Gospel becomes a *witness* before God and man against anyone who turns it down. Sooner or later, everyone must deal with it. When they resist it, deny it, doubt it and finally refuse it as false or insignificant, they sentence themselves and stand self-judged.

Nevertheless, laden with far-reaching implications, Paul's victorious shout (Col. 1:6, 23) rippled the grim silence of the persecuted Christian world of A.D. 60-62. Although his own ministry had been harrassed by perils and endless anxieties, Paul could affirm that Jesus' Great Commission was being accomplished. What Paul mentioned in passing to one congregation at Colossae, the whole Judean Christian community could also sense, as reports of the Church's worldwide progress filtered back to Jerusalem on the lips of worshipers from the Diaspora who filed into the Holy City for the yearly festivals. Peter, too, urged the brethren to steadfast resistance in the confidence that "your

brothers *throughout the world* are undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (I Peter 5:9). So, the time is almost right. Whereas, before, all had seemed to be a jumble of unrelated pieces, the puzzle is beginning to fit together. Christians could begin to steel themselves for the final crisis. While the worldwide proclamation of the Gospel, as a clue to the death-day of Jerusalem, is not very precise, nevertheless, before Jesus concluded His message, He would clearly limit the extent of the period in question to His own contemporary generation. (See on 24:34; cf. 23:36-39.)

*Then shall the end come* for what? Certainly, it was not the end of the Jewish race nor even of their national existence *per se*, because, though they lost the latter for 1900 years, they are today beginning to re-establish this in the modern state of Israel. What they really lost and, to date, have not regained, is their sole possession of the Kingdom of God, their unique hope of the Messiah, the most significant and real symbols of God's reconciliation of man with Himself in the Levitical priesthood, the sacrificial system, the wonderful typology of the Tabernacle and Temple plan. These were all brought to final completion once for all in our Lord Jesus Christ. These were theologically lost to Israel at the cross. (Cf. *Romans, Galatians* and *Hebrews*.) What followed until 70 A.D. was merely the foredoomed struggle between the Judaism of Jesus' day and death.

If only *then shall the end come* after the completion of all the aforementioned events, if Jewish history must grind on until that date, before which the tragic end could not occur, then certainly the Second Coming must wait no less time. So, how can it be so confidently affirmed that well-informed first-century Christians held to the unsupported belief that Jesus must soon return? If so, they deduced this on some basis other than Jesus' exchatological discourse, because in it He leaves every clue to indicate the groundlessness of such a hope (24:48; 25:5, 19).

#### b. The precise, decisive signal of the end (24:15)

**24:15** When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand). . . . Here is the crucial signal, but its formulation is most remarkable. For, if Matthew intended to prepare first century readers for an event so critical as this, an event which would require attentiveness and instant flight at the appearance of

the first signal, he could scarcely have expressed himself more ambiguously, unless, in the very nature of this vital clue is a truth of tremendous significance that would require its expression in precisely these words. What does the codification of the decisive key have to say about the date of Matthew's quotation of Jesus' words? In fact, Luke, presumably writing for a non-Jewish readership, simply deciphers the coded part into literal language: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near" (Luke 21:20). What factors could have induced Matthew not to decodify Jesus' expression, leaving it unintelligible for readers unfamiliar with Daniel's prophecy?

1. Presumably only Jewish readers would know the meaning of *abomination of desolation*, since the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy was a sad chapter in their own history (Dan. 11:31; 12:11; cf. 1 Macc. 1:10-64; 6:7). This gave the expression its particular usefulness for describing a future event similar in import to the past one.
2. Presumably only Jesus' disciples, among all Hebrew readers of this text, would trust Him to know that this cryptic reference to Daniel has anything to do with life and freedom in the later national emergency. But even if unbelievers learned this password, making the code-word an open secret among Hebrews generally, it is less likely that Jewish unbelievers would reveal to Romans a secret so potentially useful to themselves. (Study Josephus' intriguing note: *Wars*, II,20,1: were those fugitives only Christians, only unbelievers, or both?)
3. Presumably, then, this code-word for Jerusalem's H-hour would remain unintelligible for heathen readers. But why should Jesus, or Matthew, wish to hide vital truth from Gentiles, if this could mean their physical safety? Simply because these instructions are not needed by non-Christian Gentiles living anywhere in the world, but by those Christian Jews yet dwelling in Jerusalem during the critical period in question. Any pagans antagonistic to Jews generally or who would sympathize with Roman policy, if aware of a fantastic plan whereby many eminent Jews (Christians) could escape the Roman grip on Jerusalem, could have hindered Christians' flight and thwarted Jesus' warning, by simply reporting His plan to Roman authorities. These, in turn, could have taken counter-measures to expose and capture even Christian Jews along with their unbelieving brethren. Unquestionably, any Gentile Christians resident in Judea would receive explanations from their Jewish Christian brethren.

If these considerations have worth, then not only Jesus' original statement, but also Matthew's record thereof antedate the fall of Jerusalem. Matthew penned his document at a time when the critical code-word still had practical usefulness in its undecodified form, i.e. before 70 A.D. Composition after this date would more likely have eliminated this vagueness and not called attention to critical signs which, because documented after the fact, would be outrageous hypocrisy and more highly suspect as a forgery. As it stands, however, the cryptic word is evidence of an early date.

(*Let him that readeth understand.*) This parenthetical remark is either Jesus' words or Matthew's urgent note:

1. If Jesus said it, He meant, "When you read Daniel, grasp what he meant by this cryptic phrase, *abomination of desolation*." Even Daniel was told to "know and understand," since the revelation was not easy to understand. One needs a mind experienced in dealing with God's past revelations. However, Mark does not even mention *Daniel*, so the primary emphasis is on the critical clue itself, more than on its literary origin. Even without reference to Daniel, any patriotic Jew who ever attended the Dedication Feast knows what Daniel meant by *desolating sacrilege* (1 Macc. 4:36-59; 2 Macc. 10:1-8; Josephus' *Ant.* XII,7,7; John 10:22ff.).
2. Rather, this parenthetical exhortation is addressed by the Evangelists to their readers: "Dear reader, fix this unique, final signal firmly in mind, so that you will remember it and escape at the time indicated." This warning argues that the Gospel was written prior to the first march of the Romans on Jerusalem under Cestius Gallus, A.D. 66.

So, why affirm that *the abomination of desolation* was spoken of by the prophet Daniel? Does Jesus intend to identify the fulfillment of Daniel's famous prophecy of the Seventy Weeks (Dan. 9:20-27)? Opinion is greatly varied on this point, simply because it is difficult to give a conclusive beginning or ending date satisfactory to all, without ignoring some important data. Unfortunately, Daniel 9:24-27 is not the only possible source of the expression quoted by Jesus, since *abomination of desolation* appears also in Daniel 11:31 and 12:11 in undoubted reference to Antiochus Epiphanes. Because this pagan brute had taken Jerusalem and in 168 B.C. outraged Jewish religious feeling by erecting an altar to Zeus in the Temple thus profaning it, the Jews since that time feared that an analogous

sacrilege could be repeated. What happens once can happen again. This realization loaded the expression with the tremendous emotional force it possessed as a sign of an approaching disaster for Jerusalem and its Temple. Clearly understood by the Jews of the Greek period, this stereotyped phrase was already applied by the author of 1 Maccabees 1:54 to the outrage perpetrated by Antiochus IV. (Cf. also 1 Macc. 6:7.) Thus, without intending to indicate the fulfillment of a specific prophecy, Jesus could still have utilized this historico-literary allusion, since this unforgettable point of reference evoked a horrifying image and created an emotional impact something like "Remember Pearl Harbor!" to the Americans after December 7, 1941.

It is unquestionably tempting to believe, with Kik (*Matthew XXIV*, 26) that "our Lord quotes from the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27." But while it may be sure that "the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 finds its fulfillment in the atoning sacrifice of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem" (*ibid.*, 51), is it likely that Jesus would have risked the clarity of the all-important signal whereby Christians could escape the impending wrath upon Jerusalem, by basing it on a prophecy which itself depends upon critical calculations for the clarity of its undoubted fulfillment? Consider these questions:

1. Are the seventy "sevens" to be considered 490 literal years or symbolic periods?
2. Are these solar or lunar years?
3. Is the "decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" from which calculations are to begin:
  - a. The decree of CYRUS (B.C. 536; Ezra 1:1ff.)? If so, 483 (= 7 + 62 heptads) years end in 53 B.C. in no apparent connection with Christ.
  - b. The decree of DARIUS I (B.C. 519; Ezra 4:24; 6:1)? If so, 483 years end in 36 B.C.
  - c. The decree of ARTAXERXES I (B.C. 457; Ezra 7:7-28)? If so, 483 years end in 26 A.D. and the 490 years (70 heptads) end in 33 A.D.
4. Thus, while it is conceivable that Jesus could point to Daniel 9:24ff. which would be completely fulfilled in His generation, the above-mentioned uncertainties render it less likely that He would pinpoint the critical signal by linking it with the interpretation of a prophecy like that of

Daniel's Seventy Weeks, because it was too complicated for the common people.

5. If we presuppose that Jesus is thinking in terms of the LXX and no other version, the expression, *desolating sacrilege* (*tò bdélugma tês erēmōseōs*), appears as such only at 12:11 in the LXX, a reference to 11:31, but not to 9:26 where a plural form is used. This distinction is important beyond simple linguistics. Daniel makes three uses of expression, *abomination of desolation* or its equivalent, but they do not refer to the same object. In fact, in Daniel 9:26 he speaks of events leading up to and contemporaneous with the Messiah, but in 11:31 and 12:1 he forepictures events during the Maccabean era. This makes the *abomination of desolation* in 9:26 ROMAN, and that referred to in 11:31 and 12:11 GREEK. Taken together, these literary allusions furnish a grisly foreshadowing of the final *desolating sacrilege* accomplished by the Zealots, Idumeans, Assassins and other terrorists and finally by the Roman army in 66-70 A.D. But, to establish the literal fulfillment on Daniel 9:24-27, one must begin from the correct starting point in order correctly to calculate the events down to the coming of Christ and the establishing of the Church. However, because the definite date for the conclusion of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel is not specified in the prophecy itself, readers from 33 A.D. onward would still need to trust Jesus to know when the *abomination of desolation* predicted in Daniel 9:24-27 must occur. Thus, the Christians' comprehension of the complete fulfillment of Daniel 9:24-27 would have to await the events themselves. For this, Jesus provided a signal based on a historico-literary allusion too painfully clear for misconception, based not on Daniel 9:27, but on Daniel 11:31 and 12:1.

So, because Jesus' warning would be perfectly valid without it, it is unnecessary to affirm that He intended hereby to interpret Daniel's prophecy as an ancient prediction of the Roman invasion of His own times. Rather, for His own purpose He apparently borrows Daniel's expression because of its vivid historical connotations. He intimates that what Antiochus Epiphanes did against Jerusalem would find tragic repetition in what the Romans would do, even though not literally predicted by Daniel in Daniel 11:31 or 12:11. He means, then,

“When you see the slightest suggestion that the agonizing history of Jerusalem’s pollution and desolation by Antiochus Epiphanes is about to be repeated, escape before you are trapped in the doomed city.” One of the incredible sidelights of the final siege was the presence of a Greek general who, with Titus’ ungrudging permission, led his Macedonian troops in an unspectacular assault on Jerusalem’s wall. His name? Antiochus Epiphanes! (*Wars*, V,11,3).

Another important conclusion may be drawn from Jesus’ wording: our Lord considers the author of the wording in question to be *Daniel the prophet* himself, not some unknown understudy or later disciple who supposedly edited Daniel’s work. Nor is he some unknown Jew of Maccabean times who foisted off his own reading of history down to his own times, as if it were actually a prophecy by the ancient Jewish hero of Babylonian and Persian times. (Cf. critical introductions to the book of *Daniel*.)

## REQUIREMENTS FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF DANIEL’S WORDS

If *the abomination of desolation* is to be a precise, decisive signal to warn believers of Jerusalem’s imminent downfall, the following conditions must be met:

1. The signal must involve an *abomination*, i.e. an outrage of Jewish religious sentiments. The sacrilege can be accomplished by anything God has taught His people to regard as idolatrous. (Cf. the bronze serpent, II Kings 18:4; Jer. 4:1; 7:30; Ezek. 5:9, 11, esp. v. 14; also Molech the *abomination* of Moab, Chemosh the *abomination* of Ammon” I Kings 11:5ff.; II Kings 23:13.) Josephus terms the Roman ensigns “images” because of Caesar’s image thereon and because of the worship offered them (*Ant.* XVIII,3,1; *War*, VI,6,1). Various near-sacrileges occurred before 70 A.D. When Pilate stubbornly insisted on introducing Roman standards bearing Ceasar’s effigy into Jerusalem, he faced so resolute a resistance he was compelled to concede and remove them (*Ant.* XVIII,3,1). Vitellius, Pilate’s contemporary and president of Syria, was persuaded by Jewish leaders not to march his armies across Jewish territory, because of the idolatrous insignias on Roman banners (*Ant.* XVIII,5,3). While these *abominations* brought no desolation, because each respective crisis was averted, yet they reveal the depth

and intensity of Jewish aversion to the Roman banners, due to the *abomination* involved.

2. The *sacrilege* must also threaten *desolation*, i.e. it must be a religious outrage that brings desolation in its wake. This codeword is no merely stereotyped phrase, since the event portended was life-menacing. When in 168 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes took Jerusalem by treachery and committed sacrilege by building an idol altar dedicated to Olympian Zeus upon God's altar, slew swine upon it and compelled Hebrews upon pain of death to forsake God's worship, he desolated the religious basis of Israel's national existence (*Ant.* XII,5,4; 1 Macc. 1:41ff.; 6:7; 2 Macc. 6:1-5). So, the original *abomination of desolation* was instigated by a foreign conqueror, the result of a disastrous war in which the City and Sanctuary were desecrated, ending sacrifice and offering. (Cf. Dan. 11:31; 12:11.) This suggests that pagan armies would perpetuate the sacrilege. (Cf. Luke 21:20.)
3. The signal must be *standing in the holy place* "where it ought not to be set up" (Mark 13:14). Where, however, or what is this *holy place*? The Temple? Jerusalem? the Holy Land itself? To be an effective signal, it must be visible, obvious to all, unmistakable: *when you see*. Hence, it cannot be half-hidden in the interior of the Temple house where presumably no eyes, but those of a few priests or the desecrators of *the holy place*, could penetrate. So, *the holy place* need not mean even the Temple's grounds, consecrated to God but desecrated in some way by pagan armies. Rather, because He had made it His dwelling place, the entire Holy City belonged to God, and even to threaten its holiness by idolatrous banners is to desecrate it. (Cf. 5:35.) So reasoned the Jews (*Ant.* XVIII,3,1).
4. The signal must occur at a time when Christians would be in a condition of real liberty to flee from Jerusalem despite the City's encirclement by foreign troops (24:16; Luke 21:21). This could occur under the following conditions:
  - a. Roman armies could flood across Palestine, taking city after city, moving ever closer to the capital. However, their troop movements and the establishment of Roman garrisons of occupation do not close up all escape routes whereby Christians could escape, although Jerusalem is virtually surrounded, even if not totally besieged. (Cf. *Wars*, IV,9,1.)
  - b. Jerusalem itself is totally surrounded by Roman troops in siege positions, rendering escape virtually impossible, but, for some

incredible and unexplained reason, the siege is suddenly lifted and the Roman legions unexpectedly retreat, granting a moment for Christians to evacuate the City. Thus, the sign cannot occur during or after the *final* Roman siege has begun.

- c. But it must also occur before Jerusalem's sectarian defenders render all escape impossible by considering it a desertion of their cause to abandon the City and tantamount to joining the Romans. Hence, it cannot have occurred after the Zealots locked Jerusalem's gates against the possibility of escape or desertion by its inhabitants.

Any reference to events that do not meet these requirements must be judged mistaken, because Jesus intended this critical signal to function successfully and be of practical help to His people. If, for example, *the abomination of desolation* must be thought of as (1) the desecration of the Temple by the outrages committed in the Temple by Jewish terrorists themselves (*Wars*, IV,6,3) of (2) the erection of the Roman standards within the Temple (*Wars*, VI,6,1), then, where is the Christians' freedom to escape the City?

"One thing this sign cannot mean," knowledgeable sources might confidently assert, "is an army besieging Jerusalem, since escape from the city would be impossible once the siege began!" Who but Jesus could be trusted to know that, even though Jerusalem were surrounded by a formidable military power, escape would still be incredibly possible by a totally improbable lifting of that siege? Who but a true Prophet could foresee with unerring certainty that a well-armed, well-disciplined army would inexplicably lift a successful siege from a desperate city and simply march away "without any reason in the world" (*Wars*, II,19,4-7). Who could predict this with such confidence as to make this obviously improbable event the very sign which would permit His followers to discern the critical moment to escape? And yet, this is the interpretation given by Luke (21:20). *The abomination of desolation*, then, is to be a pagan army planting its idolatrous banners on soil that belongs to God's people within His Holy City.

The fact that vile abominations were imported by the Roman conquerors AFTER the city's desolation is no argument against this interpretation. Rather, the appearance of these outrages against God occurred too late to save any lives. The common sense of Jesus implies that the critical signal be given in time

for Christians to escape BEFORE the final siege began, whereas both in the case of Antiochus Epiphanes (*Wars*, I,1,1-2; *Ant.* XII,5,3f.) and in that of Titus' conquest, the abomination connected with its permanent desecration occurred AFTER the city was taken.

### THE FULFILLMENT OF JESUS' PROPHECY

Although the Jews were not by any means united in their attitude toward Rome, they still longed for a political Messiah as a solution to their national situation increasingly infected with the disease of creeping revolt. Many vindictive blood baths and retaliatory measures took place in which hundreds of Romans, Samaritans and Jews were slain or severely wounded. The most significant took place in November of 66 A.D., convincing a vast group of eminent Jews to flee the City. Other Jews, "when they saw the war approaching to their metropolis [i.e. Jerusalem], left the feast, and betook themselves to their arms . . ." (*Wars*, II,19,2). In concept, this closely parallels Jesus' warning: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that its desolation has come near." The unbelieving Jews saw it and armed themselves to fight Cestius Gallus and the Romans; the Christians saw it and abandoned the city. Josephus describes the daring escape mechanism thus (§§4-7):

Cestius, observing that the disturbances that were begun among the Jews afforded him a proper opportunity to attack them, took his whole army along with him, and put the Jews to flight, and pursued them to Jerusalem. He then pitched his camp upon the elevation called Scopus. . . . But when *Cestius was come into the city*, he set the part called Bezetha . . . on fire; as he did also to the timber-market; after which *he came into the upper city*, and pitched his camp over against the royal palace; and *had he but at this very time attempted to get within the walls by force, he had won the city presently, and the war had been put an end to at once*; but Tyrannius Priscus, the muster-master of the army, and a great number of the officers of the horse had been corrupted by Florus, and diverted him from that his attempt; and that was the occasion that this war lasted so very long. . . . Thus did the Romans make their attack against the wall for five days but to no purpose. And now it was that a horrid fear seized upon the seditious, insomuch that many of them ran out of the

city, as though it were to be taken immediately; but the people upon this took courage, and where the wicked part of the city gave ground, thither did they come, *in order to set open the gates, and to admit Cestius as their benefactor, who had he but continued the siege a little longer, had certainly taken the city;* but it was, I suppose, owing to the aversion God had already at the city and the sanctuary, that *he was hindered from putting an end to the war that very day.* It then happened that Cestius was not conscious either how the besieged despaired of success, nor how courageous the people were for him; and so he recalled his soldiers from the place, and by despairing of any expectation of taking it, without having received any disgrace, *he retired from the city, without any reason in the world.*

Cestius' mode of retreating practically invited the Jewish insurrectionists in Jerusalem to follow him away from the City in hope of galling him at every opportunity. Rather than take decisive action by marching to Antipatris directly, he kept stalling his departure at each encampment until so many Jews surrounded him that the Roman troops were outnumbered (*Wars*, II,19,9).

So the Jews went on pursuing the Romans as far as Antipatris; after which, seeing they could not overtake them, they came back and took the engines [of war, i.e., catapults, etc.], and spoiled the dead bodies; and gathered the prey together which the Romans had left behind them, and came back running and singing to their metropolis; when they had themselves lost a few only, but had slain of the Romans five thousand and three hundred footmen and three hundred and eighty horsemen.

It was at this critical moment, while the terrorists pursued the retreating Romans, Josephus (*Wars*, II,20,1) remembers, "After this calamity had befallen Cestius, many of the most eminent Jews swam away from the city, as from a ship when it was going to sink." Who were these people? While the Jewish historian names a few, were there no Christians in that mass exodus?

Further, that the time factor was critically limited is evident in a further note by Josephus (*Wars*, II,20,3): "But as to those who had pursued after Cestius, when they were returned back to Jerusalem, *they overbore some of those that favoured the Romans by violence, and some they persuaded by entreaties to join with them.*" Later, even the slightest intimation that someone was making plans to leave

Jerusalem was justification for the insurrectionists to slit his throat (*Wars*, V,10,1)! How important it was to believe Jesus and abandon the City on time! The opportunity for escape was fearfully limited. The door was left open when the terrorists and others rushed out of Jerusalem in pursuit of the Romans, but the door slammed shut as they returned. The time to go had come—and GONE. Those who saw that Cestius Gallus had entered an important suburb of Jerusalem, Bezetha, and visibly pitched his camp opposite the royal palace just outside the inner wall, proudly displaying his idolatrous Roman standards in his camp, recognized the sign of which Jesus had spoken years before. So while the pagan army retreated, the Christians fled.

Unquestionably Cestius Gallus had planted Roman insignias within the city of Jerusalem in 66 A.D. Although his camp was situated outside an older wall, the site on which he chose to erect his camp was the "New Town," or Bezetha suburb. This addition to Jerusalem was surrounded by a wall that linked it to the capital proper. So, a *desolating sacrilege* had appeared at Jerusalem and gone, leaving an escape route open for God's people. (See *Wars*, V,7,2.)

It should be noticed that Cestius' retreat was not the only opportunity for Christians to flee the City. It was merely the best one. There was temporary respite from the Roman advance on Jerusalem, when Vespasian suspended operations against it due to the death of Nero in A.D. 68-70 (*Wars*, IV,9,2). During the short reigns of Galba, Otho and Vitellius (A.D. 68, 69), Vespasian and Titus simply waited due to the tension mounting in the Roman Empire. This afforded little opportunity for many to escape from Jerusalem, however, since the Zealots in Jerusalem and the Romans encompassing the city on all sides practically deprived them of this liberty (*ibid.*, §1). Some even managed to escape the City's fate after the Zealot-Idumean pollution of the Temple (*ibid.*, 7,1; see also on 24:24).

## 2. Urgent, practical instructions for rapid escape (24:16-20)

**24:16 Then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains.** Up to this point the Lord was advising disciples not to panic in the presence of misleading signs by acting hastily on the basis of superficial judgments about the times. Now He must protect them against the ill-advised fanaticism of the rebels who would hope that God would miraculously deliver Jerusalem from its assigned destiny. (Cf. *Wars*, V,11,2.) This error compounded their confusion and funnelled them

all right into the Roman meat grinder. Here, too, the ancient observation would find another appropriate application: "Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will" (Dan. 12:10).

*Those that are in Judaea* are those who believe Jesus enough to act on the signal He gives. *Judea* may or may not include all of Jewish-controlled Palestine. Luke often uses this geographic term in this sense, but Matthew seems to use it here in the more limited, provincial sense, i.e. only the area south of Samaria, not all of Jewish territory. Certainly, *Judea* involves Jerusalem directly, as Luke adds: "Let those who are inside the city depart and let not those who are out in the country enter it" (Luke 21:21). Christians who would actually be dwelling in the target area at the moment by the warning, who would see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, would otherwise think to take refuge in the City as a place of perfect security. There would have been no reason whatever to urge believers to attempt a physical escape, if Jesus had in mind His own Second Coming when we will no longer need to escape, but shall finally rise to meet Him in the air. The key-word is *flee* from the would-be disaster zone, *Judea*.

*Flee unto the mountains.* Is it not most singular that anyone should advise leaving a city as well-fortified as Jerusalem which could withstand a long siege and enjoyed a superior military advantage over its attackers? To the common-sense observer of the day, the question was, "Why should these otherwise sensible people become fools for sake of their Christ?" But the true wisdom of the Christians was amply justified by its results. In fact, if God Almighty is planning to rain down judgment on a city and warns His people to abandon that locality, it is the height of folly NOT to leave! (Cf. Jer. 51:45f.; Gen. 19:14-22.)

Part of the cause of the magnitude of the tragedy surrounding Jerusalem's death lay in the fact that, shortly before the final siege-works closed the city, "on the feast of unleavened bread, which was not come . . . Eleazar and his party opened the gates of this . . . temple, and admitted such of the people as were desirous to worship God into it" (*Wars*, V,3,1). Vast multitudes of Jews and proselytes poured into Jerusalem despite the war-time conditions, to worship at the Passover (*Wars*, VI,9,3). Confident of God's protection, they crowded into what, ironically, would prove to be their grave, sealed in by their own people (*Wars*, V,1,5). Jesus ordered His people, "*Flee!*" (See also Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III,5.)

*To the mountains.* Because Jerusalem itself is located on a ridge in the hill country of Judah, hills surround it both on the north and south. Even though these hills themselves are not high, still, in contrast to the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea far below them, they would seem mountains by contrast. So, where are *the mountains* to which Christians must flee? Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist.*, III,5) reports:

The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city, and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella.

Pella is located east of the Jordan River in the edge of the hill country of Perea between the Jabbok and Jarmuk Rivers, south of Gadara, southeast of Scythopolis (Bethshean) northwest of Gerasa. This city of the Decapolis lies about 4 km (2.5 mi.) from the Jordan. This location so near the river is not yet well into the higher hills of Perea farther east. So, in what sense would an escape to Pella be tantamount to flight *to the mountains*? Josephus (*Wars*, IV,8,2) contrasts the hill country of Cisjordan with that of Transjordan thus:

[Jericho] is situated in a plain; but a naked and barren mountain of a great length, hangs over it, which extends itself to the land about Scythopolis [Bethshean] northward, but as far as the country of Sodom and the utmost limits of the lake Asphaltitis [Dead Sea] southward. . . . There is an opposite mountain that is situated over against it, on the other side of the Jordan; this last begins at Julias [Bethsaida Julias, see Luke 9:10; Mark 8:22; John 6:1] and the northern quarters, and extends itself southward as far as Somorrhon, which is the bounds of Petra in Arabia.

So, Jesus could speak of *the mountains* and be understood by others as referring to what we might call "hills" in contrast to the Alps or the Rockies. In fact, at some point in their eastward rush, Christian refugees must cross the Jordan River. Were they to cross opposite Pella from the valley of Bethshean, they must descend to the river's level at -259 m (-850 ft.) below sea level. Coming out on the other side, they must climb out of the inner Jordan Valley (*Zôr*) onto the wider Jordan plateau only -137 m (-450 ft.) below sea level. Then they would begin the real climb to the 874 m (2868 ft.) above sea level in the first 10 km (6.2 mi.). This represents a total gain of over 1134 m

(300 ft.). Although such tall hills, of course, do not compare with Mount Hermon to the north, anyone walking that particular stretch of country would be ready to call those hills *mountains*. Regardless of which route Christians took to arrive at Pella, they would be moving from the level of the Jordan River at whatever crossing they chose, toward the Gilead mountain range that arises to an average height of 1220 m (4000 ft.) above the Jordan Valley, or to about 915 m (3000 ft.) above sea level.

Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 858) offers four arguments for rejecting the fourth century assertion that the Christians went to Pella: "Scholars who have made a special study of the early history of the Jerusalem church doubt this fourth century A.D. report. They tell us that *a.* in order at this time to get to Pella, believers would have had to break their way through lines of Roman soldiers; *b.* the people left in Pella were filled with bitter hatred against all Jews, including Christian Jews; *c.* Pella could not have provided housing for all the refugees; and *d.* if the escape had been attempted at a slightly earlier date, the Christians would have fallen into the hostile hands of the fanatical Jewish freedom-fighters."

Unhappily, these arguments ignore several important points and contain several false assumptions involving both the geography of Palestine and the chronology of the Roman occupation of Palestine.

1. Certainly, if the fleeing Christians took the Jericho road and either of the two roads flanking the Jordan River for easier travel north to Pella, they might have encountered Romans. The same could be affirmed of travel straight north to Bethel, Shechem, Scythopolis and Pella. However, if they entered the hilly country northeast of Jerusalem, bypassing any towns garrisoned by the Romans or occupied by Zealot sympathizers, it is far less likely that they would have encountered enemy troops. Engines of war could not be hauled over those hills with ease, and the infantry would be worn out by the constant climbing and descents. The same is also true for the refugees themselves, but they have at least gained the advantage of staying away from the main-travelled routes leading to Jerusalem.
2. What inhabitants of Pella would not receive the fleeing Jewish Christians? Pella was one of the cities whose population has been

DESTROYED by Jews in retaliation for the anti-Jewish massacres in Caesarea (*Wars*, II,18,1). Thus, along with other abandoned cities of the Decapolis, Pella could well have been settled by Jewish Christians fleeing from Jerusalem. Josephus specifically states: "some cities they destroyed there and some they set on fire . . . some they burned to the ground entirely demolished." But he is silent about the fate of Pella and other Decapolis cities, limiting himself to say "they laid waste the villages of the Syrians and their neighboring cities," which perhaps refers only to their inhabitants. It was shortly after the above-mentioned massacres that Cestius Gallus encircled Jerusalem (*Wars*, II,19,1,8). Then he retreated, leaving the way for Christians to flee from the capital to these *abandoned* cities of Decapolis.

3. Although we may presume that, despite persecutions, the Jerusalem Church remained of significant size even to the times of Paul's great, final visit (cf. Acts 21:17-22), for how many refugees must lodging be found in Pella? Because of the earlier massacre of its inhabitants, the Christians would become *the majority*, if not *the exclusive* population, to take possession of the property of the former inhabitants of the now practically empty city.
4. While it is true that after Vespasian swarmed into Palestine, there were Roman garrisons in Bethel and Ephraim, blocking that route (*Wars*, IV,9,9), earlier, however, immediately after the disastrous retreat of Cestius Gallus (*Wars* II,19,1-8; 20,1), that route would have been relatively open. In fact, both Jewish insurgents and Roman troops together were moving northwest *away* from Jerusalem toward Antipatris. The fanatics, thus, were led AWAY from the Christians' escape route by the retreating Romans, leaving even the critical well-travelled highways to the northeast quite free.

EASE OF ESCAPE DEPENDS ON TIMING. If the signal came before Vespasian arrived in Palestine after the debacle of Cestius Gallus at Jerusalem, then Christians would have been quite free to desert the capital and travel to Pella and other cities.

#### The Hindrances of Possessions (24:17f.)

24:17 **Let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out the things that are in his house.** *On the housetop* pictures the flat-roofed constructions so common around the Mediterranean. The

limited, and in some areas almost non-existent, snowfall permits builders to create a roof terrace to gain further living space and storage. In Scripture, the paved, flat roof was a place for drying flax (Josh. 2:6), for privacy and rest (I Sam. 9:25f.), for prayer (Acts 10:9), as an observation post (Isa. 22:1) or a place from which to make public announcements (Matt. 10:27). Jesus does not order His followers to escape by jumping from rooftop to rooftop until they could reach the city wall and let themselves down nor does He order them not to descend from their own rooftop in an orderly manner. Rather, they are not *to go down to take out the things that are in the house*. Life preserved is more than possessions conserved. Anyone who has ever moved his possessions from one town to another and must decide which items were absolutely essential and which things might be abandoned without loss, understands the time-consuming, decision-making process that would hinder the instant flight of the householder. Further, transporting cumbersome household goods would require further precious time to secure the necessary transport. Speedy removal of a house full of goods collected over a lifetime was out of the question, but the temptation would arise to try it anyway. Therefore, Jesus enjoins instant, unencumbered escape while there was still time.

**24:18 And let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak.** Here is a Christian farmer working his ground near Juersalem, lightly dressed only for sweaty field work. The warning signal to flee catches him at work, without his long robe that serves as an overcoat and, in the case of the poor, also doubles as a blanket at night (Deut. 24:12f.; Exod. 22:26f.). But even this vital item of clothing is to be abandoned in favor of departure without delay. Jesus is emphasizing an exodus so hasty that people would be evacuated with just the shirt on their back!

#### Unavoidable Personal Hindrances (24:19)

**24:19 But woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days!** This *woe* depicts the plight of both believing and unbelieving mothers alike in those fateful days (Luke 23:28f.). Any mother would suffer. Due to excruciating hunger during the famine of the siege of Jerusalem, Jewish mothers devoured their own children, just as God said they would (Deut. 28:49-57; cf. *Wars* V, 10, 3; VI, 3, 4f.). Contextually, however, Jesus' reference is to the Christian mothers

who, because pregnant, or because nursing children, would not be able to travel rapidly for long, forced marches plunging through rough country without provisions or adequate shelter.

### Hindrances Beyond Christians' Control

(24:20)

24:20 **And pray ye that your flight be not in winter, neither on a sabbath.** *Pray* means that God is not unaware of your plight nor unconcerned about you in those terrible uncertainties nor are those trials an evidence He had abandoned His people. Rather, even though your escape cannot be avoided, your suffering may be alleviated. You should continue to beseech Him for what might seem to be trivial blessings, but which could make all the difference between succumbing and survival.

*Your flight:* what is contemplated is the believers' escape, hopefully not during certain periods. Obviously, none of these directions concern Christ's Second Coming, because under what conditions may the believer's rising to meet the Lord in the air be considered an escape from dangers of earth, a *flight* not to be conditioned by *winters* or *sabbaths*? Must God be besought to send Jesus back to earth on the off-season, but not on the weekend?

Travel in civil-war conditions would not be safe in the best of weather. (Cf. II Chron. 15:5f.) But *in the winter*, cold, rainy weather, shorter daylight hours, bad or non-existent roads and unfordable, swollen rivers would all contribute to limit freedom of travel. Worse, camping out in such weather would be prohibitive, except for the most desperate fugitives. *Winter* might even bring snowfall (1 Macc. 13:22). Further, the fields through which the Christians must pass would not furnish any but the crudest emergency food.

The total rout of Cestius Gallus occurred on the eighth day of the month of Dios, or Marchesvan, in the twelfth year of Nero (A.D. 54-68). This would be late October or early November of A.D. 66. So, these prayers were essential, because, although their *flight* occurred about three weeks after the Feast of Tabernacles in which people had been camping out in and around Jerusalem (*Wars*, II, 19, 1ff.), the early rains would normally begin in that period (Deut. 11:14). Their prayers should be addressed therefore to Him who controls the rain.

*Neither on a sabbath.* Never would this warning have any worldwide significance, except in that country where strict, superstitious

reverence for the Sabbath would have prohibited long-distance travel on Saturday, i.e. in Palestine. (Cf. *Ant.* XVIII,8,4; XIV,4,2f.) That Mark does not mention *the sabbath* is not so much out of regard for his Gentile readers, as that this detail would not affect them outside of Palestine, whereas Matthew's inclusion of this detail would be extremely pertinent in Israel. There a centuries-old tradition, coupled with proud patriotism, had taken root, which refused to take offensive action against one's national enemies on the Sabbath. Even if Christians themselves might with justification describe their fleeing from the Roman horror as *defensive action*, zealous bigots might quarrel with their interpretation and impede their escape. Further, if city gates were locked (cf. Neh. 13:19ff.) or Sabbath closing of stores made the purchase of food for the journey or the hiring of lodging impossible among the orthodox (cf. Neh. 13:15ff.), dangerous delays would mount up.

And what of those Jewish Christians whose ingrained habit continued to hold "one day above another" (Rom. 14:5f.)? Their cultural orientation might still cause them to think of the Sabbath as a day on which no work might be done. (Study Acts 21:20b-26.) Because Jewish believers still observed many cultural mores, perhaps many in Jerusalem still acted on Saturday as they always had, even though they knew it had been surpassed by Christ. Nevertheless, even though Jesus' sabbath doctrine (cf. 12:8-11) was elastic enough to permit life-saving escape, yet those who would not travel more than a "sabbath-day's journey" would travel no more than a kilometer away from the danger zone.

### 3. Motivation: great, unprecedented tribulation (24:21)

24:21 **for then shall be great tribulation.** *For* connects this *great tribulation* with the hasty escape just mentioned to avoid the punishment of Jerusalem (v. 20). That this cannot be the "great tribulation" of Revelation 7 is evident because the sufferings of Matthew 24 are punitive justice poured out by God on an unbelieving Israel and from which the Christians could escape alive on earth by following Jesus' instructions. They would actually avoid this *great tribulation* meant here, whereas those who must suffer it and die in it were the wicked of Israel who had crucified their Messiah, persecuted His Church and filled up the measure of their fathers (23:23ff.). Contrarily, those who come out of "great tribulation" in Revelation 7 are the victorious

from every nation, tribe, people and tongue who have been purified by the blood of Christ (Rev. 7:14ff.). There are simply TWO "great tribulations," one through which the unbelieving in Israel passed, and the other which Christians must endure. The fact that they were sometimes contemporaneous must not confuse us regarding their perpetrators, their intentions nor their victims. The Jewish *great tribulation* of 66-70 A.D. must not be confused for the trials suffered by Christians during the present age down to Christ's coming (Rev. 7:14).

**Great tribulation such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no and never will be.** This language appears to depict an event so horrible that Jerusalem's demolition must be sought by relating the prophecy to some later, even future temple. But three motives induce us to conclude otherwise:

1. God had already used this kind of language before: "How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it" (Jer. 30:7). Uniquely grand and terrible would be that later day intended, but Jeremiah proceeds to explain that its occurrence would be completely earthly as the events in world politics would permit God's people to return to their homeland. (See Jeremiah's context.) Further, Daniel too wrote: "There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then" (Dan. 12:1). And yet, despite the horrors of that distress, the deliverance of God's people was guaranteed, because "at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered."
2. This same thought form was considered appropriate by Jesus' contemporary, the Pharisean(?) author of *Assumption of Moses* 8:1, to describe the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes:

And there shall come upon them a second visitation and wrath, such as has not befallen them from the beginning until that time, in which He will stir up against them the king of the kings of the earth and one that ruleth with great power who shall crucify those who confess to their circumcision. . . .

3. Josephus (*Wars*, Preface, 4) lamented:

Accordingly it appears to me, that the misfortunes of all men, from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to these of the Jews, are not so considerable as they were.

Josephus (*Wars*, V,10,5) further noted:

Neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, *from the beginning of the world*.

After tallying the number of captives of 97,000 and those who perished during the entire siege at 1,100,000, whether by pestilence, famine or murder, Josephus then concludes in highly wrought, emotional language: "The multitude of those that therein perished exceeded all the destructions that either men or God ever brought upon the world." While it is fashionable to dismiss Josephus for exaggeration, one must consider his lament in the light of its theological and spiritual significance, evident even to this Jewish observer.

Now, if it be thought that Jews are given to hyperbole when describing monstrously horrible facts, should not Jesus prepare His disciples to face this particular disaster by using language appropriate to the terrible grandeur and spiritual significance of the events portrayed? If it be argued that the fall of Jerusalem, however indescribable its horrors, is nevertheless beggared by comparison with the Nazi holocaust that wiped out a greater number of Hebrews, let it be recalled that the magnitude of what Jesus predicts is not to be evaluated merely in terms of the number of lives or the value of the property lost. Rather, its meaning lies in the *kind* or *quality* of the catastrophe.

This *great tribulation* must be adjudged such in light of the sentence Jesus had just pronounced upon Israel (23:29-36, esp. v. 35). If the punishment of that nation was to be the proper judicial climax to a process of rejecting God's witnesses *from the beginning of the world until now*, "from the blood of the righteous Abel to the death of Zachariah," consummating in the crucifixion of Israel's Messiah, then it should not be surprising that unparalleled privations, torture and slaughter should accompany this terrible visitation of God's wrath so horrible as to defy description. (Cf. Luke 21:23 and similar language used by the author of 1 Macc. 1:64 to describe the original "abomination of desolation." See also 1 Macc. 9:27.)

One of the significant differences between the "great tribulation" suffered by the Christians (Rev. 7:14) and that endured by the Jews (Matt. 24:21) is that to a significant degree the latter was self-inflicted. Without diminishing the seriousness of the heartless slaughters of Jewish people by Syrians and others (*Wars*, II,18), the most damage

to Hebrew people during the final hours of their Holy City came from their own countrymen, not so much from the Romans (*Wars*, IV,5,3-5). In fact, Vespasian astutely refused to seek military advantage in the civil war raging inside the city, lest he thereby instantly unite the Jews against the Romans. So he determined to let his enemies destroy each other with their own hands (*Wars*, IV,6,2). The degree of barbarity rose to such heights that Jews considered the dead most happy (*ibid.*, 6,3). Josephus (*Wars*, V,6,1) chronicled:

For they never suffered anything that was worse from the Romans than they made each other suffer; nor was there any misery endured by the city after these men's actions that could be esteemed new. But it was most of all unhappy before it was overthrown, while those that took it did it a greater kindness; for I venture to affirm, that *the sedition destroyed the city, and the Romans destroyed the sedition*, which was a much harder thing to do than to destroy the walls; so that we may justly ascribe our misfortunes to our own people and the just vengeance taken on them by the Romans.

Not least among the miseries was the entire absence of any mercy shown fellow Jews who happened by the evil destiny of war to be on the wrong side, or in possession of food or valuables sought by Jewish plunderers who went from house to house, assaulting, robbing and killing. No moral law, no honor, no mercy! Where was that superior righteousness that Israel had flaunted before the benighted pagans?

Not least among the agonies was the soul-wrenching anguish of doubt, "Why does not God save us, His people, racked and wretched as we are?" To be abandoned by God must be the most heart-rending tragedy imaginable for anyone, and it was theirs in that dark hour. This was literally the end of an era (*suntélia toû aiônos*, 24:3).

So, this *great tribulation* is, for us, now past, because the destruction of Jerusalem was the gruesome climax of that period. This is not to say, unfortunately, that all, or even any, tribulation is over for the Christians, since, in fact, Jesus was not even discussing this latter issue. After 70 A.D. John still considered himself a sharer in the Christian tribulation (*thlipsis*, Rev. 1:9). Temptations and crises of every kind will plague us down to the last minute before our Lord's return, simply because evil shall be left in the world until that time. (See notes on 13:24-30, 36-43; cf. Acts 14:22; I Thess. 3:3f.; II Thess. 1:4f.; Rev. 7:14.) However, the horror-filled death-throes of Jerusalem and its Temple are past.

But what is there to fear, then, if this all be over? What encouragement to righteousness is there, if modern man must contemplate this event as all but forgotten in the dust of history? Much every way! Jesus has been proved true as an authentic spokesman for God. All that He foretold about OUR future may be studied with far more serious reflection, and all that He commands must be obeyed with greater promptness and eagerness. We may trust Him for leadership during our trials.

#### 4. Duration: short but terrible (24:22)

**24:22 And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.** *Those days* are the ruthless bloodbath just described (v. 21), identified as *those days* in which Christians must flee from Judea (v. 19) at the time of the "desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place" (v. 15). See also Mark 13:17, 19 and Luke 21:23 which use "in those days" to identify this period. *No flesh*: Jesus is discussing only Hebrew *flesh*, i.e. the entire Jewish people, not all of humanity. Everyone in Israel would have been wiped out in the Roman malestrom that would take the nation and all its people with it. Jesus uses *saved* here, not of spiritual salvation, but in the sense of avoidance of death. (Cf. 8:25; 27:40, 42, 49.)

A remarkable series of events contributed to the abbreviation of the sufferings:

1. The earlier emperor Claudius had forbidden Agrippa to complete significant fortifications that would have rendered Jerusalem's northern flank virtually unimpregnable (*Ant.* XIX,7,2). Consequently, both Cestius Gallus (*Wars*, II,19,4) and Titus (*Wars*, V,6, 2; 7:3) found the wall around the New City ("Bezetha") easier to demolish. This tightened his vice-like grip on the capital sooner.
2. Shortly before Titus arrived at Jerusalem, the three-way civil war within the city *shortened those days* in a surprising manner (*Wars*, V,1,4). One of the terrorists

. . . set on fire those houses that were full of corn, and of all other provisions . . . as if they had, on purpose, done it to serve the Romans, by destroying what the city had laid up against the siege, and by thus cutting off the nerves of their own power . . . almost all of the corn was burnt, which would

have been sufficient for a siege of many years. So they were taken by the means of famine, which it was impossible they should have been, unless they had thus prepared the way for it by this procedure.

3. Internal dissension divided and seriously undermined Israel's defenders.
4. Due to battle fatigue and fear compounded by emotional stress caused by desertions and their own physical distress, the Jewish terrorists' nerve was broken to the point they even abandoned unassailable bulwarks. Josephus (*Wars*, VI,8,4f.) reflects,

Here one may chiefly reflect on the power of God exercised upon those wicked wretches, and on the good fortune of the Romans; for these tyrants did now wholly deprive themselves of the security they had in their own power, and came down from those very towers of their own accord, wherein they could have never been taken by force, nor indeed by any other way than by famine. And thus did the Romans, when they had taken such great pains about weaker walls, get by good fortune what they could never have gotten by their engines; for three of these towers were too strong for all mechanical engines whatsoever. . . . *So they now left these towers of themselves, or rather they were ejected out of them by God himself, and fled.* . . . So the Romans being now become masters of the walls, they both placed their ensigns upon the towers, and made joyful acclamations for the victory they had gained, as having found the end of the war much lighter than its beginning; for when they had gotten upon the last wall without any bloodshed, they could hardly believe what they found to be true. . . .

- After inspecting this fortification, the Roman general himself could not but confess, "We have certainly had God for our assistant in this war, and it was no other than God that ejected the Jews out of those fortifications; for what could the hands of men, or any machines, do towards overthrowing those towers" (*ibid.*, 9,1)!
5. Crowded conditions were created by the Paschal crowds that had poured into the Holy City just prior to its encirclement by the Romans. Because of the scanty provisions, the pestilence created by festering corpses and the hideous brutality, survival of anyone became a debatable question.

These factors, taken together, facilitated the Roman victory, took off the pressure against Rome and essentially *shortened those days*. The Roman siege of Jerusalem lasted from shortly before the Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan until the eighth of Elul in Vespasian's second year (*Wars*, V,3,1; 13,7; VI,10,1). Thus, from April to September, Jerusalem's capture was completed in the relatively brief span of five months. By contrast, it had taken Nebuchadnezzar over a year and five months to bring the city to its knees (Jer. 52:4-7, 12).

**But for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.** Even the abbreviation of the time allotted for the troubling of God's people was a concept in vogue in Jewish apocalyptic literature. (Cf. 2 Baruch 20:1f.; 83:1.) There, however, *the elect* are the righteous in Israel and the days of judgment would punish the Gentiles, the apostates and glorify the proselytes to Judaism. But here, according to Jesus, who are *the elect*?

*The elect*, in Scripture, is a term always to be understood from God's point of view, ideally referring to those whom He chooses to be His people. But His election is not unconditional, for His choice presupposes their free choice to be His by loving, obedient faith. Hence, here, *the elect* are those Jewish Christians who as "the remnant" of visible, national Israel, formed the nucleus of the new Israel of God (Rom. 11:5-7; Gal. 3:7-9, 26-29; 6:16; Eph. 1:4; Phil. 3:3) as well as converted Gentiles (Rom. 11:11-32). To affirm that *the elect* must refer exclusively to God's former people, national Israel, is to forget that Matthew, though himself a Jew, has already taught that true participation in God's program is not a question of parentage (3:8-10) personal power (7:22f.), pampering and past privileges (8:10ff.; 11:20-24; 21:33—22:14), or perspiration (20:1-16), but a question of proper priorities and appropriate openness with God. No unbelieving Hebrew could be described as *elect* in this definitive sense.

So, because it is exegetically impossible that Jesus could have spoken so ambiguously as to embrace both the converted and the unconvertible of Israel under the term, *the elect*, He refers here, as also in 24:31, to the people of the Messiah, the free citizens of the Kingdom (17:26), who lived to see and hear the very things for which the fathers had long waited (13:17) and enjoyed the personal knowledge of "the secrets of the kingdom" (13:11). In short, *the elect* are those fortunate (from the Jewish standpoint: Luke 14:15) people who lived in the days of the Messiah and served Him, the

Christians. For them the critical *days shall be shortened*, for although they fled from Jerusalem in time and were relatively safe from immediate danger, they could not avoid other privations elsewhere in Palestine spawned by the war: famine, pestilences, shortages and other break-downs in every area of civil life wrecked by the war.

To know that *those days shall be shortened* brings comforting assurance and hope. This affirmation fairly sings its confidence, infusing its certainty into believing hearts:

1. God's true Prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, knows that the terrible days just described will not go on forever. They will end. This fact convinces believers that it is worth it to hold on patiently till the end.
2. Neither Satan, nor Rome nor the evil men in the land are either final or omnipotent. The duration of the suffering has already been established by the determinate planning of Almighty God who is in full control, notwithstanding the soul-crushing terror stalking the land.
3. This shortening is even a decree of mercy for Jerusalem, for if it blesses Christians, it also gives respite to the tormented survivors of Jerusalem's siege because the terrors would be over for them too, since even Roman treatment of captives would be merciful by comparison to the barbarities suffered from their own people.

This hope confirms another conclusion by evidencing how misguided is any rapture theory that imagines God's people to be caught up out of this world before the great terrible tribulation. If our text is thought to be evidence of the final "great tribulation" (Rev. 7:14), and not merely of the Jewish sufferings at Jerusalem in 70 A.D., then what are *the elect* doing present in the tribulation? If they were all previously "caught up" to heaven, according to the rapture theory, then why must *the days of the tribulation be shortened for the elect's sake*?

Ulterior confirmation of the correctness of the view that the "great tribulation" here pictured by Matthew refers to the shocking debacle of 70 A.D. comes from Luke 21:23f. where this same period is thus summarized: "For great distress shall be upon the earth (land?) and wrath upon this people. 24 They will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive among the nations; and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." Avoiding all the Jewish rhetoric of Matthew and Mark to describe these dramatic events, Luke furnishes important interpretative details:

1. *Great distress upon the earth (anàgkē megālē epì tēs gēs)*. *Gē*, here rendered *earth*, can also refer to "a land, a district, a region or country." (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 156.) So, Jesus may be discussing merely "the land par excellence highest in the Hebrew mind, Palestine." His parallel phrase, *wrath upon this people*, confirms this view, because *this people*, contextually, refers to Jerusalem and the dwellers of Judea (Luke 21:20f.; cf. v. 24).
2. What would happen to Israel could only be termed *wrath*, probably of both God and men. Although Titus himself was mild and conciliatory to the end (*Wars*, VI,2,1-4; 4:3-7; esp. 6:2; 8,2), the Roman legions were the appropriate rod of God's wrath. (Cf. *Wars*, V,1,3; 8,2; 9,3f.; 13,5; VI,1,5; 9,1.) Roman vengeance simply punished Israel's violations of the Old Covenant (Deut. 32:35; 28:15-68; cf. Hosea 9:7; Jer. 5:29), not to mention their refusal of God's Son and His messengers (Matt. 23:34-39). Jerusalem well deserved both the Roman and the Divine *wrath*.
3. *Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles*. (Cf. 24:2; *Wars*, VII,1,1.) This city has literally gone under the heel of Gentiles from A.D. 70 onward, as Romans and a host of other Gentiles dominated it down to the time of the Arabs. Rather than promise the fondly hoped-for restoration of God's kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6), the Lord revealed that Israel's fate would be dispersion and disintegration and the City's destiny is desolation.
4. The effect of this disaster would be lasting, but not necessarily eternal; simply *until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*.
  - a. The simplest interpretation of this key time-limitation is that the desolation would last until the Gentiles, as instruments of God's government of the world, had completed this punitive judgment on the City and its people, the Jewish nation itself.
  - b. However, because the expression, *the times of the Gentiles (kairoi ethnôn)*, may correctly speak of the *opportunity* which God grants the Gentiles, not merely to punish Israel, but primarily to enjoy His grace, Jesus means that the aforementioned disaster would continue during the period when the gracious offer of salvation is granted the Gentiles through the Gospel. (Cf. Mark 13:10; Rom. 11:25; Matt. 21:43.) Bruce (*Training*, 327) sees this special period of Gentile opportunity as "corresponding to the time of gracious visitation enjoyed by the Jews, referred to by Jesus in His lament over Jerusalem. Then he concludes:

It is incredible that Jesus should speak of a time of the Gentiles analogous to the time of merciful visitation enjoyed by the Jews, and imagine that the time of the Gentiles was to last only some thirty years. The Jewish *kairòs* lasted thousands of years: it would be only mocking the poor Gentiles to dignify the period of a single generation with the name of a season of gracious visitation.

Alford (I,637) is probably correct to notice that *the times (kairoi)* is plural because *the gentiles* is plural: "each Gentile people having in turn its *kairòs*."

- c. NOTE, however, that nothing is affirmed here about what will occur once *the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*. Jesus does not affirm that the Jews will return to Jerusalem under the same terms they always enjoyed prior to their loss of the Holy City. That Jews have returned to the City is a fact of modern history, but their conversion either to the complete message of the Old Testament or to the Christ of the New Testament is not. Rather, the period in question may end when the Gentile world per se rejects Christ, just as the Jewish dispensation ended when the Hebrews as a people turned Him down. In fact, after *the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*, God could bring world history to a complete halt, judge everyone and start eternity rolling for us, without so much as one backward glance at Jerusalem, Palestine or Jews.
- d. Another important observation: contrary to many views of Matthew 24:29-31 based on the expression, *until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*, it may be correctly inferred that an indefinite period of time would follow Jerusalem's fall, so that Christ's return to earth could not be expected shortly after the Judean crisis. As will be seen, "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (24:29) may be interpreted in its natural sense, because it is not the Second Coming of Christ that is being announced for the period directly following Jerusalem's destruction. (See on 24:29.)

5. Warning: no hope of Christ's personal coming during the siege (24:23-28)

- a. Despite apparently miraculous signs, all false hopes of deliverance raised by false prophets must unswervingly be disregarded (24:23-26)

24:23 **Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ, or, Here; believe it or not. Then (tôte),** i.e. during the same general period referred to before ("in those days," "then," vv. 19-22), thus, in the last, distress-filled days prior to the overthrow of Jerusalem. Although the appearance of false hope can plague Christians of any era, the peculiar uncertainties of a war-torn, first-century Palestine could stimulate unwarranted trust in rumors that Christ had returned to earth. This would tempt Jewish believers living in the Diaspora to flock to Palestine because of their love for Jesus and for their religious homeland. But it would also draw them right into the Roman trap just before it would spring shut. Jesus would not have His people lay down their lives unnecessarily for a wrong-headed nationalistic movement with which they should have no true, spiritual affinity or association.

*If any man shall say unto you. . . .* Contrary to false rumors, Jesus' true appearance will be so obvious and convincing (24:27) that there will be no need for false intelligence reports by charlatans! *Believe it not:* this command is repeated in v. 26 to make its force emphatically clear. Here is a severe test of one's discipleship: whom shall I believe when my world is falling apart? Jesus would guard His followers from losing Christ while believing themselves about to find Him!

The fact that Jesus reiterates this warning (24:4) is thought by some to be a change of subject from the perils surrounding the Jewish War to the Second Coming, for, say they, He could not have desired merely to repeat information already given, unless it related to another subject as, in this case, the Second Coming. On the contrary, the breakdown in communications between Christian groups that could occur in the chaos of the crumbling nation might well entice those congregations to rally behind anyone who held out a glimmer of hope for the doomed nation. This explains why our Lord must make His point emphatically clear by repeating it, especially in connection with the great tribulation of A.D. 66-70.

24:24 **For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible,**

**even the elect.** *For:* this verse and those following reinforce verse 23 by way of parenthetical explanation. Jesus will not leave this point until verse 27. The excited cry, "Here is the Christ!" or "There!" (v. 23) is not to be believed because it involves false claims put forward by imposters, backed by deceptive credentials. Here the Lord returns to an earlier theme (v. 5) to clarify a particular point. But the fact that He is doing this helps to determine to what time period the information most specifically refers. The contention that "history knows little if anything of such false Christs prior to the Destruction of Jerusalem" has no validity, because it does not ask the right question. We must ask WHAT KIND of messianic concept moved the masses, and even Jesus' disciples, in the first century. Only thus will become clear WHAT KIND of *great signs and wonders* would have been so appealing as to tempt God's precious nucleus, the remnant that believed Jesus, into abandoning the true Christ for *false christs*. (Examine texts like the allurements and challenges Jesus was offered to become a Jewish Messiah: Matt. 4:9; 11:2; 16:21f.; 27:39-43; Luke 22:49; John 6:14f.; 7:3, 4; Acts 1:6.) These texts reveal the basely materialistic, nationalistic messianism of Jesus' contemporaries and explain the power of the temptation to all who held such notions. (See notes on 18:1; 20:20-28.)

So, a *false Christ* was not an Antichrist in the Johannine sense (I John 2:18ff.; II John 7) or even one who would necessarily perform lying wonders by Satanic power, in the Pauline sense (II Thess. 2:9), but a demagogue in Israel who pretended to be everything Jesus was not, but who would give Israel the kind of Christ Israel longed for but which Jesus refused even to offer. *False prophets*, in the Old Testament sense, are men who offered false hopes to a doomed, unrepentant Israel. (Cf. Jer. 8:10f.; 14:14-16; 20:1-6; chap. 23; 27:9-21; chaps. 28, 29; 37:19; Ezek. 13; 14:9-11; 22:28; chap. 34.)

Josephus' history documents the appearance of a number of politico-military messiahs who cruelly deceived themselves and the people with unfounded schemes for re-establishing the ancient independence of the theocracy as they conceived it (*Wars*, II,13,4; VI,5,2f.). Although the Lord had predicted the appearance of false prophets before the end (24:5), there would also be impostors during the Roman siege of Jerusalem too. Josephus (*Wars*, VI,5,2f.) recounts:

*A false prophet* was the occasion of these people's destruction, who had made a public proclamation in the city that very day, that God commanded them to get up upon the temple, and there

they should receive *miraculous signs of their deliverance*. Now there was then *a great number of false prophets* suborned by the tyrants to impose upon the people, who denounced this to them, that *they should wait for deliverance from God*; and this was in order to keep them from deserting, and that they might be buoyed up above fear and care by such hopes. Now, a man that is in adversity does easily comply with such promises; for when such a seducer makes him believe that he shall be delivered from those miseries which oppress him, then it is that the patient is full of hopes of such deliverance. . . . Thus were the miserable people persuaded by these deceivers, and such as belied God himself; while they did not attend, nor give credit, to the signs that were so evident, and did so plainly foretell their future desolation; but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see the minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them.

Surprisingly, despite guards set to prevent their escape (*Wars*, V,1,5), many succeeded in leaving Jerusalem by one means or another, even after its encirclement by the Romans (*Wars*, IV,6,3; 7,1; V,10,1; 13,7; VI,2,3). Even after that horrible carnage had begun within the city, people could yet be duped by false claims to speak for God and promise Israel's deliverance, and not even think of abandoning the doomed city. Because eventually 40,000 people were "saved, whom Caesar let go whither everyone of them pleased" (*Wars*, VI,8,2), even during the worst fighting and with the greatest menace from fiercely suspicious Zealots inside the City, the temptation would still be high to remain in the "fortress protected by God." So, Jesus' warning is also His attempt to save even beyond the last minute anyone who would believe Him in those horrifying circumstances and flee the City.

McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 621) caught the spirit of the times:

Nothing is more natural, however, than that the excitement attendant upon the ministry of Jesus should encourage many to attempt to become such a Christ as the people wanted. The Gospels show so widespread a desire for a political Christ that the law of demand and supply would be sure to make many such.

These all, the false deliverers and those taken in by them, fell for the temptation which Jesus resisted firmly to the end. His polestar was the program of God. Troubled times tempt men to embrace anything

that promises relief, and, without anchors, they welcome deceptions, instead of clinging to the help promised by God through the Scripture.

*So as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.* That ominous condition, *if possible*, must stir each believer to the core, "What kind of Christ-concept do I have, that would expose me to being led astray? What signs would function so effectively as finally to deceive me?" The possibility of fatal deception by imposters, in fact, is in direct proportion to the degree each believer uncritically and perhaps unwittingly already accepts the basic presuppositions on which the imposter's claims are based: desire for national independence from Rome, greed for gold, lust for power, blind commitment to the proposition that God is inextricably bound to bless the nation's political and economic future. Here is the choice: do we follow the popular theories, or do we trust Jesus instead?

**24:25 Behold, I have told you beforehand.** Why foretell these events? (Cf. John 16:1-4.) Three reasons suggest themselves:

1. "Despite the frightening prospects that are enough to paralyze decisive action, remember: you are thoroughly prepared to face this future with information and courage. You are not among the unbelievers who must wring their hands in despair over the dark unknown that looms over them. Rather, you know both the extent and the God-ordained limitations of that period (24:34). Further, you now possess directives for your conduct and for Gospel proclamation during the intervening years, and specific instructions about what to do when the final crisis of Jerusalem arrives at last. It is a stabilizing force and comfort to know that I have already clearly foreseen and foretold it forty years before the storm finally breaks, and have given you sound advice."
2. So, forewarned is forearmed. "The very appearance of impostors, since I, the true Christ, have warned you, will actually save you from being deceived. Their coming will prove I was right, justify your faith in me and save you." With these advance warnings that every rumor that Jesus had returned are false, Christians could calmly and without hesitation refute them as they arose. Because signs and wonders could be produced by false prophets (Deut. 13:1ff.; Acts 8:9ff.; II Thess. 2:9f.; Rev. 13:13f.), such wonders alone were not a final, definitive test of one's divine authority. The context of God's well-authenticated revelations were to serve as a check. (Cf. Isa. 8:20.) In this case, Jesus offers His own word as that framework with which to test others' claims.
3. Although He does not use the emphatic pronoun, "I" (*egò*), in

which case His point would be more emphatic, nevertheless, by calling attention to the prediction, He obtains the same result: "Notice, I have made you a prediction" (*idou proeirēka humîn*). Jesus has just placed His own prophetic ministry to the supreme test. If things do not take place as He predicted, HE TOO IS A FALSE PROPHET. This challenge is but one more way for Him to present His prophetic credentials. (See my notes on "prophetic credentials," Vol. III, 377f.) By so doing, He puts everyone's discipleship to the test: does each believe He knows what He is talking about? Do I trust Jesus that much?

**24:26 If, therefore, they shall say unto you.** (See notes on v. 23.) After furnishing the background for His order not to be duped by anyone who pretends to announce Christ's return, He amplifies it by listing other situations wherein the deceptive announcement could come.

**Behold, he is in the wilderness.** Not only would the deserted wastes of Palestine furnish an excellent base camp and mustering area for revolutionaries, but also a tempting quiet solitude for monastic contemplation under the leadership of imposters masquerading as ascetics of "the old school." For those who rejected John the Baptist (cf. 11:2-19), a text like Isa. 40:3-5 could be distorted and pressed into service for sectarian ends. The Qumran sect, for example, chose the wilderness to await the Messiah. Consider the case of Theudas. (See on 24:5.) Jesus' warning against going out into the wilderness is intensely practical, for it happened again under Felix (*Ant.* XX, 8, 6; cf. Acts 21:38) and again under Festus (*ibid.*, §10).

**Behold, he is in the inner chambers.** The presumably secret return of Christ linked with the claim He was in hiding until the moment of public revelation would entice the ignorant who claimed not to know where Christ should come from. (Cf. John 7:27.) Such secrecy, enforced by the charlatans and accepted by the gullible, would furnish maneuvering room for the pretenders to foment revolt and develop in their followers the psychological dependence essential to create a cohesive movement.

**Go no farther . . . believing it not.** So saying, Jesus pushes the disciples' confidence in His prophetic announcement to its logical conclusion: whose word will you follow? that of these false christs, however attractive, or this order given by me, your Master and Lord? What you do about either will decide your true loyalty. *Believe it not* means, BELIEVE ME!

b. Christ's true coming will be too obvious to require prophetic announcement (24:27)

24:27 **For:** what follows explains why none of the above-mentioned false announcements of Christ's return are to be believed. *As the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man.* (Cf. Luke 17:23f.) In contrast to a localized coming marked by gradualism and the concealment and secrecy of the false christs who promise a revelation to a select few, the Second Coming will be so obviously visible as to need absolutely no advance publicity. By calling it *the coming (he parousia)*, Jesus implies that there would be only one such appearance and no prior secret raptures about which any prophets on earth could make the aforementioned predictions.

There cannot be a supposed double reference in this verse (1) to His coming in providence to destroy Jerusalem, and (2) to His return on the Final Day. His coming in judgment on Jerusalem would be attended by clear signs indicating the approach of the critical hour, permitting Christians to escape the worst. But His final return will give no forewarning, but will strike like lightning, unexpectedly; not locally, but obvious to the entire world; not hidden temporarily only to be revealed by degrees, but everywhere, instantaneously and unmistakably visible; not in shoddy secrecy, but in brilliant, heavenly glory beyond all possibility of imitation.

Although the disciples first asked about *the coming of the Son of man* (24:3), this is the first time in this discourse Jesus mentioned His coming (*parousia tou huiou tou anthrōpou*). By using the word which became one of the usual technical terms for the Second Coming (*parousia*), He meant no other than His personal return at the end of the present world age. (Cf. I Cor. 15:23; I Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; II Thess. 2:1; James 5:7f.; II Peter 1:16.) How, then, is it possible for Him to insert information about His final return into a context that unquestionably involves problems connected with the final years of the Jewish state and the fall of Jerusalem? It is because the disciples had wrongly connected Jesus' Second Coming with the fall of Jerusalem. Hence, they too would be easily deceived by false announcements in that fateful era (v. 3). So, He must inform them that the Second Coming shall not require private prophetic preannouncements.

However, just because He has now mentioned His Second Coming does not mean He will continue to elaborate on it at this point. Many

have assumed that this is His procedure in vv. 29-31. Instead, it was sufficient for His purpose to assure the disciples that His coming, WHEN IT EVENTUALLY TOOK PLACE, would not be concealed, as preached by imposters, but perfectly evident to everyone. This first glance at His glorious return is inserted here only to illustrate how completely it contrasts with the views thereof preached by the ignorant. Hence, there is no need at this point to ask where Jesus changed over from discussing Jerusalem's fall to begin answering the disciples' question about the Second Coming. This is rather an insertion to clear up a misconception, not evidence of a complete change of subject.

c. Israel's hopeless deadness cannot but  
attract scavengers (24:28)

24:28 **Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.** *Eagles (aetoi)* would be better translated "vultures," because the birds pictured here are carrion-eaters, whereas eagles, for the most part, kill their own food. (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 19; *I.S.B.E.*, 885f.; however, see Job 39:30b.) Further, the figure Jesus uses is not so much that of a swift flight of eagles that plummet on their yet-living prey (cf. Deut. 28:49; Jer. 4:13; 48:40; 49:22; Lam. 4:19; Hosea 8:1; Hab. 1:8), as that of the congregation (*ekéi sunachthésontai*) of vultures around *the carcass*. While for us, eagles and vultures are two distinct birds, the ancients classified the vulture among the eagles. (Aristotle, *Animal History* 9,32; Pliny, *Natural History* 10,3; Hebrew uses *nesher* indiscriminately for eagle [see the above passages], or vulture, Mic. 1:16; Prov. 30:17.)

Earlier (Luke 17:37), when questioned about WHERE these events would occur, He responded with this proverbial expression. To determine the sense and application of this striking aphorism we must recognize it for what it is, a proverb. Not to be taken literally, it stands symbolically for some other, literal reality. Expanded, Jesus' observation, would be, "See, you can recognize that the decaying remains of a corpse is lying on the ground, because of the vultures hovering over it. These make it evident to the observer that there is little or no life in what was once alive, only death and corruption." But what, in Jesus' allusion, is the *carcass* and what the *vultures*?

1. Because He had just spoken of His Second Coming, some apply His proverb to this event, believing that *wheresoever* cannot limit

His reference exclusively to one place like Jerusalem. Rather, wherever the condition of spiritual deadness is found, the sudden, punitive vengeance of the coming Christ will plummet, like the eagle to seize its prey. Granted, Jesus' words have the generalized ring of a proverb with multiple applications. However, to what specific case did He refer it this time? Further, the aforementioned objections to *eagle* are applicable here.

2. Contextually, Jesus is returning to His warning about false christs and false prophets whose excited pronouncements about a returned Christ could attract and destroy God's elect. In this case, *the carcass* would be the general moral corruption that invested the Jewish nation, while *the vultures* picture the imposters who profit from this spiritual confusion to serve their own interests.
3. However, since Jesus' larger context includes the destruction of Jerusalem, *the carcass* could be Jerusalem while the vultures would be the Roman army. Precisely because of the deteriorated political situation in Palestine, Rome had to intervene to bring order out of chaos. (Study Josephus' diagnosis of Palestinean politics from 60-70 A.D., *Ant.* XX,8,5; cf. chaps. 5-11, also his *Wars*, Preface, 2.) There is no necessity to notice the use of eagle symbols on Roman banners, for two reasons: (1) Jesus' meaning would be the same without any direct reference to them, and (2) to take *eagles* literally of the Roman standards but interpret *the carcass* symbolically is illegitimate hermeneutics. Further, this interpretation is less direct and obvious, since, in this paragraph, Jesus was not discussing Jerusalem's being surrounded by armies with their eagle banners, His immediate concern being the appearance of imposters raucously gathering around Israel like vultures to fatten themselves on Israel's moral putrefaction.

Either way, whether He means false prophets or Roman soldiers, Jesus argues that no hope of deliverance from God could be expected, just destruction and elimination of Jerusalem's glory. There would be no angels to liberate Israel, just vultures to devour the carcass.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Cite the New Testament texts that indicate that the Gospel could have been universally proclaimed throughout the entire world in the first century.
2. What did Jesus mean by the "abomination of desolation"? Prove

- your answer by indicating from what source He quoted that phrase or where the reader must go to get an explanation for it.
3. The words "let the reader understand," are inserted in parentheses. Who said them and why?
  4. Explain how believers were to react to the one, clear, final signal that the desolation of Jerusalem was about to occur. What evidence is there that they reacted correctly?
  5. Explain why people in Judea, an already hilly country, are told to "flee to the mountains." What "mountains" are meant? How did the early Christians carry out Jesus' directions?
  6. Explain why Jesus thought there would be so many people "on the housetop."
  7. Explain why someone out in the country would want to enter Jerusalem to "take his mantle." What is this article and why is it important?
  8. Explain why people should not "take anything that is in (their) house."
  9. Explain why pregnant women and nursing mothers are singled out for special notice in the escape instructions.
  10. What hindrances to escape are peculiar to winter or to the sabbath in Palestine?
  11. If the "great tribulation" was to be totally unprecedented since "the beginning of the creation of the world" (Mark 13:19), how can Luke with propriety summarize Jesus' words that identify the particular sufferers as "this people will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles"? In what sense is the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish state rightly described as "great tribulation"?
  12. Who are "the elect" for whose sake the Lord would shorten the days of tribulation: the Jewish people per se, or Jewish Christians alone? Defend your answer.
  13. What are some of the historical factors in the crack of the Jewish commonwealth that not only precipitated its fall but also shortened the length of its tribulation?
  14. How could false christs and false prophets show signs and wonders? Reveal the source(s) of their persuasive power.
  15. Explain the allusion to the "carcass" and the "eagles" in context.

### C. The Theological Results of Jerusalem's Fall (24:29-31)

TEXT: 24:29-31

(Parallels: Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-28)

29 But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven shall be shaken: 30 and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he shall send forth 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.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Many people who read this paragraph understand it to picture the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the world. But, if "the tribulation of those days" mentioned in the previous sections concerns the destruction of Jerusalem, with what right can Jesus state that His coming would occur *immediately after the tribulation*? Or, is He mistaken, since He did not return shortly after 70 A.D.? Or does this paragraph have anything to do with His Second Coming?
- b. Why do you suppose Jesus used this weird imagery to teach us: to make His meaning difficult or to simplify it? For whom would this imagery be particularly clear and communicate thrilling news in majestic concepts? Do you think that we too could understand Him, if we too could become like those who truly understood Him? What would it take to become like them?
- c. Do you seriously believe that "stars shall fall from heaven"? After all, if stars are heavenly bodies like our sun, even larger and grander, how or where could they "fall"?
- d. Jesus already talked about "earthquakes in various places" (v. 7) as well as "terrors and great signs from heaven" (Luke 21:11) in connection with the period prior to Jerusalem's fall. Once again He names what appear to be upheavals in nature (sun, moon, stars and powers of the heavens) in connection with "the

sign of the Son of man.” (1) Is there any connection? If not, why not? (2) If these latter upheavals in nature are not to be considered literal, then, of what are they symbolic?

- e. Did Jesus say that “the sign of the Son of man (would) appear in heaven,” or that the sign which would appear would be “the Son of man in heaven”? Is it the sign which is in heaven, or the Son of man? If you decide it is the latter, then, where is the sign located? In what would it consist?
- f. Why do you think all the tribes would mourn when this great sign appears? What will the sign mean to them? What would it mean to the Christians?
- g. Where do you suppose Jesus got all these unusual expressions, such as “the sun darkened, the moon not give light, stars fall,” or “tribes of the earth mourn,” or “Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven,” or “with a great trumpet,” or “gather together from the four winds”? Did Hebrews in Jesus’ time talk that way every day? If not, under what special circumstances did they use such phrases? Where did they get this language?
- h. If someone argued that this paragraph has nothing to do with a literal Second Coming of Jesus, what arguments would you collect right out of the text itself to show his conclusion mistaken? What data would you expect him to use to establish his case?
- i. If someone denies that this paragraph refers to Christ’s Second Coming, has anything been lost for the doctrine of the literal Second Coming? Are there any other New Testament texts that teach this grand truth? If so, what are they?
- j. If there are other New Testament texts that teach the Second Coming, are we free to consider this text in another sense, if this latter interpretation should turn out to be its true meaning rather than the Second Coming?
- k. How could believers of Jesus’ generation be caused to rejoice when what He meant by His highly figurative language actually began to occur? (Cf. 24:34; Luke 21:28.)
- l. If Jesus is not talking about the Second Coming at all, but about some quite earthly events in which His believers would be involved, what is to be gained by His using this prophetic jargon?
- m. If the Messiah’s victory is to occur *immediately after the tribulation of those days*, what kind of Messianic triumph actually took place following the destruction of Jerusalem?
- n. Why do you suppose Luke greatly simplified this section for his

readers? Would not they have understood these expressions taken from Jewish literature? What does this tell you about Matthew's production?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

“Nevertheless, IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE TRIBULATION THAT WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE PERIOD JUST DESCRIBED, there shall be portents involving the sun, moon and stars: ‘the sun shall be darkened. The moon will not give its light. Stars will be falling from the sky. The celestial forces will be shaken.’ On earth nations will be in anguish, bewildered by the roar of the raging sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive about the events threatening the inhabited earth. At that time you will be able to see what is meant by ‘the Son of man in heaven.’ It is then that ‘all the tribes of the land will mourn.’ They too will experience what is meant by ‘the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven’ with power and great glory. He will then send forth His messengers ‘with a great trumpet.’ These will ‘gather’ His chosen people ‘from the four points of the compass, from the farthest horizon where heaven and earth meet.’ Now when THESE THINGS begin to occur, straighten up and lift your heads, because your emancipation is about to take place!”

## SUMMARY

In close chronological connection with the fall of Jerusalem, disciples would observe the removal of the old, established luminaries in human (esp. Jewish?) affairs. Christ's reign would be clearly evident. Worldwide gospel proclamation would successfully save those who accepted to be chosen by God. These events would all be clues of the final emancipation of Christianity from Judaism, establishing the disciples of Christ as an independent people of God.

## INTRODUCTION: HOW SHOULD WE INTERPRET THIS LANGUAGE?

Some conclude that Jesus' language in this section is too grand to depict an incident so limited as the fall of Jerusalem, or too broad to concern only one of earth's peoples, the Jews alive in 70 A.D. But before proceeding, we must ask, not modern questions, but ancient

ones: what would the original listeners have understood Jesus to mean by the language He used? In fact, as a thorough concordance study of this paragraph will demonstrate, almost every phrase is rich in literary history, having already been utilized by some Old Testament prophet to communicate awe-inspiring messages of both hope and doom to their contemporaries. What, then, would the first-century Hebrew readers of the Gospels have comprehended when Jesus made these statements?

1. **THE PROPHETS' USE OF SIMILAR LANGUAGE**, to predict the tremendous consequences surrounding the fall of pagan empires, may be thought useful language to describe one of history's greatest watershed events, the collapse and termination of Israel's exclusive privilege. If carnal Judaism is finally and publicly to be repudiated by God so that His precious elect remnant in Israel and among the nations can stand free and independent to carry out its world mission, then this event qualifies as one of the world's most momentous theological events, and should not appropriate language be adopted to portray it?

In the entire paragraph (24:29-31) the point to be solved is whether a personal appearance of the Lord is intended. The assumption of many is that the coming is literal, as also every other detail in this passage. However, were they literal when originally coined by the prophets from whom they are borrowed? If not, then by what exegetical rule do they become so in Jesus' discourse? If the prophets smoothly blended the literal and the poetic in the same prophecy, why cannot Jesus?

*The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.* What appears to be a universe gone wild is familiar talk for Hebrews saturated with Old Testament prophets like Isaiah (13:9-13) where similar apocalyptic language was coined to depict quite mundane events such as the destruction of Babylon by the Medes. Now, when an author clearly defines the meaning of his own jargon in the same context, we are not at liberty to require that he mean something else, even though his words seem to communicate much more to us because of the meanings WE associate with his expressions. (Cf. Isa. 24:18b-23 on the rise and fall of human government without God.) Later, Isaiah (34:4f.) employed similar poetic language to illustrate the earth-shaking magnitude of divine judgment on the Edomites. Ezekiel (32:7f.)

does not hesitate to borrow this eloquent speech to threaten Pharaoh and Egypt with heavenly chastisement, not by supernatural miracles, but by the quite earthly" sword of the king of Babylon (Ezek. 32:11ff.). Joel presses this kind of speech into service to represent a locust invasion (Joel 2:10f.), the blessing to God's people (2:30f.) and His judgment on their foes (3:14ff.). The Apostle Peter gave the inspired interpretation of Joel's apocalyptic language, by pointing to the events that began on Pentecost as fulfilling Joel's words: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." (Acts 2:16-21; cf. Joel 2:28-32; see my notes, Vol. II, 452f.) Haggai uses the shaking of heavens, earth, the sea and the dry land, to unfold images of international war that would turn out to the blessing of God's people. (Cf. Hab. 3:11; Amos 8:9.)

Do the sciences of astronomy, geology or ancient history confirm a literal interpretation on the terrifying cosmic disorder this Old Testament language seems to convey? On the other hand, does ancient history record the actual fulfillment of what these poetic pictures conveyed, by the overthrow of the particular nations indicated? So, what this phraseology sounds like to us does not matter. For if, by the vivid images the prophets wove, God referred to earth-shaking events whereby pyramids of power would be overturned and shattered, **THIS IS THE MEANING**. The only question now remaining is to what great overthrow or high-level transformation in human affairs resulting from Jerusalem's fall and the Gospel's spread does Jesus allude here?

Was this highly symbolic language thought literal by intertestamental apocalyptists? (Cf. Assumption of Moses 10:4-7; IV Ezra 5:4-13.) And the Apostle John, like Isaiah, Ezekiel and Joel, employed these same apocalyptic concepts to describe God's judgment on men of earth who seek to escape God's final punishment (Rev. 6:12-17). His language, as defined by his book's title is to be understood as highly figurative, not literal: "The *apocalypse* of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1). Cannot Jesus Christ Himself use the commonly accepted apocalyptic jargon of His day to convey His meaning to people who were accustomed to it? Milton Terry (*Hermeneutics*, 466) justly lamented:

We might fill volumes with extracts showing how exegetes and writers on New Testament doctrine assume as a principle not to be questioned that such highly wrought language as Matthew 24:29-31 . . . taken almost verbatim from Old Testament prophecies of judgment on nations and kingdoms which long

ago perished, must be literally understood. Too little study of Old Testament ideas of judgment, and apocalyptic language and style, would seem to be the main reason for this one-sided exegesis. It will require more than assertion to convince thoughtful men that the figurative language of Isaiah and Daniël, admitted on all hands to be such in those ancient prophets, is to be literally interpreted when used by Jesus or Paul.

The vocabulary was common to the Hebrew culture and gleaned from the Old Testament literature itself. The *people brought up in that culture understood the terms*. This explains why this apparently unconventional vocabulary would, in a sense, come to be thought of as the conventional expression for certain types of predictions. This vocabulary consists of vivid images that endeavor to describe the indescribable in human language. The power of such visions lies, not in the details, but in their ability to communicate the inconceivable in word-pictures that men can conceive.

To this some would object that to welcome the "spiritual" significance of the prophet's words is to reject the "true" meaning. But more often than not, in apocalyptic literature, the "true" meaning is not the literal one at all, but the "spiritual" one, the "actual" one, the "real" one, because for God, **WHATEVER IS SPIRITUAL IS REAL TOO**, perhaps far more so than what is material, and should not we have the same attitude?

2. **THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EVENTS REQUIRES SUCH LANGUAGE.** Because God was planning to bring about deep-running changes in the religion and political life of that people which for millennia had been His chosen people, the language used to paint this revolution must be adequate to portray the transformation. The Jewish loss of their exclusive glory, unique privileges and national prerogatives cannot but represent the cruelest blow imaginable to this people. What kind of speech could be thought sufficiently appropriate to articulate such a catastrophe? Kik (*Matthew XXIV*, 79) asked, "If the use of such figurative judgment language against pagan nations was justified, how much more fitting would it be to the passing away of Judaism?" Bruce (*Exp. Gr. Test.*, 287) saw this:

An old world is going down and a new world is coming into being. Here surely is an occasion to provoke the prophetic mood! At such supreme crises prophetic utterances, apocalyptic forecasts, are inevitable.

Should such awe-inspiring language be thought too terrible or too broad for the final vanquishing of Israel by the Romans, let its larger context be recalled. God had threatened that the doom of unrepentant Israel was sealed (Deut. 28:15-68; 29:19-28; 30:18; 31:16-21, 27ff.; 32:1-43; Mal. 3:2-5; 4:1f.; Matt. 3:7-10; 8:11f.; 21:31, 41, 43; 22:7; 23:29-39). Even as early as His conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus affirmed that Jerusalem would not be the center of worship in the Messianic age (John 4:21). So, Jerusalem's elimination was to be God's signal to the Judeo-Christian world that the old Mosaic era, with its exclusively Jewish Kingdom of God and its capital at Jerusalem, was terminated. (Cf. Gal. 4:25-31.) The bondage is over, not merely ideally, as when Christ's death ended the Law theologically, but also practically, in concretely evident fact (Heb. 12:11; 13:14).

## NOTES

1. The time connection: Immediately after Jerusalem's great tribulation (24:29a)

**24:29 But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened . . .** Unquestionably *the tribulation of those days* is the same sufferings (24:8) described earlier as "great tribulation . . . in those days" (24:19-22), a period that Luke (21:23f.) characterizes as "great distress upon the earth and wrath upon this people. They shall fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles." Therefore, what is meant by the phraseology of our paragraph (24:29-31) must take place *immediately after* that period of *tribulation* surrounding the appalling desolation of the Jewish State. (Cf. Mark 13:24.) What is about to be pictured would have a certain immediacy of connection, even if the event itself is not an integral part of that tribulation or its culmination per se. It would express the same sort of relationship that exists between cause and effect, antecedents and consequences.

It is mistaken to affirm, with some, that the glorious signs and predictions here listed hardly appear suited to Jerusalem's fall.

Granted, but these signs and predictions here listed a different, more glorious event portrayed in vv. 30, 31. However, the intended event would be not at all distant in time. This is excluded by Jesus' insistence that it be *immediately after the* foregoing catastrophe.

Further, verses 32-34 speak unquestionably of Jerusalem's destruction after the great tribulation and other successive events, because all these are scheduled to occur during the lifetime of Jesus' contemporaries. (See on 24:32-34.) Therefore, to think of verses 29-31 as depicting the Second Coming is not only to insert this subject out of place, creating a confused chronological order, but also it makes Christ assert that His own coming was scheduled for a moment *immediately after* the fall of Jerusalem, although He later denied any definite knowledge of the Father's scheduling for the Second Coming (v. 36) and clearly hinted that a long, indefinite period must elapse first (24:48; 25:5, 19). The expression, *immediately after*, is wrongly taken figuratively while all else is taken literally.

How should we deal with the contention that Luke's version (Luke 21:23-27) extends the tribulation in question from the fall of Jerusalem and the worldwide Jewish dispersion, "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled," i.e. the entire period of Gentile dominance from the end of Israel as a nation until Jesus returns again? According to this view, Jesus' return, pictured by Matthew 24:29-31, occurs *immediately after* the Gentile persecution of the Jews. On the contrary,

1. Jesus did not imply that the crisis of the "great distress" itself would last this long, but only that the RESULT of that disaster, the ruin of Jerusalem, would be long-lasting (Luke 21:24).
2. Further, He is not describing the "great (Christian) tribulation," which indeed must last until His Return, but only the Jewish one, from which the early Christians could escape by obeying Jesus. From their own sufferings Christians could not flee without faithlessness to Him. (Cf. Rev. 1:9; 7:14.)

Some, because they view the Second Coming as scheduled *immediately after the tribulation of those days* of Jerusalem's deathblow, assert that *the tribulation* He means merely COMMENCED with the collapse of the Jewish nation. Further harassment, persecution and dispersion began hard on the heels of that debacle, i.e. *immediately after*, and have continued down to the present day in which Israel, as a nation, is still subjected

to an uncertain future at best and to continual war-time emergencies at worst. However, the Lord divulged that "the days are to be shortened," NOT LENGTHENED NEARLY 2000 YEARS (Matt. 24:22).

Further, how should we deal with the contention that Luke's version (Luke 21:24-28) merely declares what would occur after the Gentiles had had their day, i.e. the signs that would prefigure Christ's coming? At least two rebuttals are possible:

1. His Return is not an event subject to prior warning signals, hence whatever is intended cannot be the Second Coming.
2. Luke is merely returning to the point in Jesus' discourse where He left off discussing the fall of Israel to indicate how long its suffering would endure. There is no time connection indicated in Luke's text, only an "and," so who can prove he must be understood to indicate facts to occur at least two millennia later, if not longer? (Cf. Luke 21:24f.)

So, *immediately after* cannot be interpreted in some figurative sense that attempts to avoid its normal, obvious sense, while interpreting literally such contextual phenomena as the sun's darkening and the fall of the stars, etc., language which, in the prophets, had acquired a conventional, hence well-understood, symbolic sense. To affirm the non-literal character of the symbols used in this paragraph detracts nothing from the admittedly literal character of the final world conflagration described elsewhere (II Peter 3:7-13; II Thess. 1:7-9).

What about PROPHEPIC PERSPECTIVE? Some affirm that *immediately after* expresses the prophet's perspective in the sense that the Seer conceives of the events as mountain peaks in the distance without being able to discern or reveal the precise distance or relationship of one peak to the other. He can describe them as one in the foreground and the other *immediately after*, or behind it. The consecutive order of the two key events prophesied is indicated, but not the time intervening between them. However, while "prophetic perspective" is at times undoubtedly a characteristic of true prophecy, this explanation must be resorted to when the events predicted cannot be considered to be connected directly in time. However, as will be shown, this impossibility does not exist in the relationship between the fall of Jerusalem and the events Jesus proceeds to portray.

If it be asked why *immediately after* should be understood literally, when everything following it should be considered "apocalyptic jargon," hence figuratively, it is because the realities expressed in figurative language actually take place in time sequences and so require time indicators to express these chronological relationships. Hence, Jesus rightly indicated the temporal connection between the foregoing prophecies and what follows.

From the point of view of Jewish nationalism, Jesus' expression, *immediately after*, is both incredible and shocking. For, how could a true, competent Christ appear *immediately after* His own Temple and capital City were demolished and His own people were dragged into captivity? Nothing Jesus promised in the following section (24:29-31) established Israel's priority or justified strictly nationalistic chimeras. Rather, He says much to dash such hopes. For, *immediately after* means He would come too late to be of any use to the Zealots and all who ultimately subscribed to their understanding of the Messianic Kingdom. It is this very feature, His *immediately after*, that marks Him as a truly God-sent Christ whose program would shake the earth, rearrange previously well-established powers on earth and accomplish what Judaism never could. From God's point of view, therefore, Jesus' timing, *immediately after*, would be perfect!

## 2. The collapse and removal of the old, established luminaries (24:29b)

**The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.** If these phenomena are figurative, as argued earlier, to what, then, do they refer? That heavenly bodies are used in Scripture to signify quite earthly people and events is well-established. Joseph's dream of the sun, moon and eleven stars referred only to his own family (Gen. 37:9f.). Nebuchadnezzar is addressed as "fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn . . . cast down to earth," because of his self-exaltation to heaven to raise his throne above the stars of God and make himself like the Most High (Isa. 14:12ff.). Compare Daniel's description of another earthly king (Dan. 8:10, 23ff.; 11:36f.). The logic of this literary phenomenon is understandable because *sun, moon, stars and the power of the heavens*

for the ancient peoples signified everything that speaks to mankind of permanence and stability. Man measured his days by *the sun*; his seasons by *the moon*; his trackless path by *the stars*. Many assumed that life is influenced by *the powers of the heavens*. Consequently, as Luke puts it (21:25f.), a universe running amok terrifies earth's people who know nothing of God's loving dominion. Worlds in chaos is highly suitable metaphorical language to depict the downfall of potentates, the eclipse of nations and the tumult of peoples.

In harmony with the symbolism created by the Old Testament writers, Jesus means that what occurs at the highest levels of government and the international level deeply affects the well-being and tranquility of the people involved. (Cf. I Tim. 2:2.) In apocalyptic language *the sea* (cf. Luke 21:25) symbolizes the world's peoples. (Cf. Dan. 7:2f., 17; Rev. 13:1, 11; 17:1, 15.) Thus, the little people of the world are profoundly shaken as top-level revolutions shake everything loose thought securely nailed down and on which society's emotional stability depends. So, Jesus is declaring that, *immediately after the tribulation of those days* surrounding Jerusalem's fall, believers would witness the breakup of all that had seemed most permanent and durable before. This great Day of the Lord would signal the end of the existing dispensation. But to which specific "heaven" did Jesus allude?

1. THE CHRISTIAN FIRMAMENT? What if this language, once used to depict deep-running convulsions in world politics, is now utilized by Jesus to depict the apostasy in the Church's life history, as some suggest? These see *the sun* as God's Son of righteousness, His Son, Jesus. (Cf. Mal. 4:2.) *The moon*, because it shines by light reflected from the sun, becomes dark when the sun is darkened. If it is the Church that reflects the light of Christ in this dark world, than her influence is eclipsed when men lose respect for the Lordship of Christ, even in the Church. Accordingly, *the stars*, looked at from the point of view of popular astronomy, are lesser lights in God's firmament of luminaries. These would symbolize those messengers in the Church whose ability to give men guidance is dimmed by a growing apathy toward God's Word. (Cf. Rev. 1:16, 20; 2:5.) In this sense, then, roots of apostasy, already manifest in the apostolic period, would produce a general defection from God's revelations, faithfulness to the Lord would wane and the Church would truly undergo the "Dark Ages." This dimming of the Greater Light and the Lesser Lights actually occurred reasonably

*immediately after the tribulation of those days* in 70 A.D. The farther the Church moved from the revealed truth after the death of the Apostles and early witnesses, the dimmer grew its witness, leaving a distressed world without confident leadership that would preach only God's Word. But from the standpoint of His Jewish audience, it would seem more probable that Jesus referred to something more in line with the Old Testament revelations to Israel.

2. THE JEWISH HEAVENS. He meant the Jewish heavens of His own era, the religious and civil powers of that condemned nation. Because the religious authority was of such crucial importance for the supreme uniqueness of Judaism, the tottering and collapse of the Temple, its priesthood and sacrificial system could be considered by the orthodox and reflective among the people as nothing less than the end of an era (*sunteleias tou aiōnos*; 24:3). During the first fifty years of the first century, for example, who could have foreseen with certainty that Herod Antipas, Annas, Caiaphas and all they stood for in the world would all be rudely snatched from their Jewish heaven and hurled into political oblivion? And yet those stars fell, that sun and moon shone no more! If these cataclysmic events are correctly interpreted as applying to Israel's defeat, then it is clear that *immediately after* their national disaster of 70 A.D., the once-exalted, unique theocracy of Israel went into permanent eclipse as God's light-bearers before the nations. (Study Heb. 12:25-29 as commentary on this transition.) Now the Church of Christ occupies this glorious position (Phil. 2:15f.; John 8:12; Matt. 5:14ff.; I Peter 2:9f.). Although Christianity would be established at a time when kingdoms, thrones and religious systems would be thoroughly shaken, it would be a Kingdom that shall never be shaken or replaced by anything better this side of glory (Dan. 2:44; 7:14; Heb. 12:28). From the viewpoint of Jesus' contemporaries, the loss of Judaism's glory would be a world-shaking tragedy indeed, an eclipse. From God's point of view, however, the removal of things that can be shaken in order to establish a Kingdom that cannot be shaken is but to treat the former as obsolete. What, for Him, was already growing old was ready to vanish away even in the first century (Heb. 8:13; 12:27f.).

### 3. The Messiah's victorious, heavenly reign vindicated (24:30)

**24:30 Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven.** *Then*, as in v. 9, may mean (1) "during that time just alluded to";

or (2) "thereafter, after the events just mentioned, next in order." As will be seen, either meaning is applicable here, because in the light of the conflagration that destroyed Jerusalem's Temple the Jews could see Jesus' every warning and prophecy fully justified, and His authority vindicated more and more with the passing of the old order.

*Then shall appear the sign*, but Jesus does not indicate where it would be seen. He certainly did not affirm that a sign would appear in heaven, because *in heaven* does not modify *sign*, but *the Son of man*. It is not, as many believe, "the sign in heaven," but *the Son of man in heaven*. What does appear will indicate (= signify) the presence of *the Son of man in heaven*.

But is this a genitive of apposition or a genitive of source?

1. Genitive of Apposition: *the sign* which is *the Son of man in heaven*. Some argue that Christ is His own self-evidencing sign. But, if the appearance of the Son of God in the sky were the sign, then Jesus would be using the word *sign* in a way foreign to every other normal meaning of this term. Normally, a *sign* substitutes for the object to which it points, so how could He Himself be the "sign," when His own personal appearance is supposedly the reality to be pointed out?
2. Genitive of Source: *the sign* comes from, or is given by, *the Son of man in heaven*, sent by Him to indicate something to men. This is the conventional use of this term and the preferable interpretation.

Jesus furnished His people a sign that would be plainly evident on earth, that would convince thoughtful, informed men that He had indeed been exalted to heavenly power, i.e. that He is truly *the Son of man* and is *in heaven*, and that His divine authority, supernatural power and providential influence is at work in all these earthly events. At this point He passes over in silence all the great miracles that He would have been doing for more than forty years previous to this last, great demonstration. Thus, just as He passed over the multiplicity of miracles He was doing during His earthly ministry and pointed to His resurrection as the grand proof of His identity and authority (cf. John 2:19-22; Matt. 12:38-40), Jesus does not mention all the powerful evidences of the Holy Spirit's activity from Pentecost until 70 A.D., opting to give men as final proof an evidential sign which consisted in the wrecking of the old institutions of Judaism.

So, *the sign of the Son of man in heaven* has nothing to do with the Second Coming, because, though the disciples had requested

“the sign of your coming (*parousia*)” (24:3), Jesus declared that His Second Coming would occur with no prior indication of its near approach. No forewarning *sign* could or would be given (24:36, 42ff., 50; 25:13). Therefore, what is meant by verse 30, where a *sign* is clearly promised, cannot refer to an event which, by divine decree, can have no early warning signal. *The sign* in question will be further amplified shortly.

**And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn.** The translation, *earth*, (*gê*) is misleading since the Greek *gê* also means “a land, region or country.” In the Hebrew mind *the land* par excellence is the Promised Land, Palestine. Conclusive confirmation of this interpretation comes from Zechariah 12:10ff., the source of Jesus’ language. That prophet predicted that, following an unusual out-pouring of grace and supplication on the royal Davidic house and on Jerusalem’s inhabitants, God’s people would look on Him, the One whom they pierced and *mourn* bitterly as for a firstborn son. The weeping in Jerusalem would be so great as to be reminiscent of the nation’s grief when the good king Josiah fell in battle in the area of Megiddo (II Chron. 35:20-25). Rightly did they mourn, for with Josiah’s untimely death religious reform ended and Israel’s final decline accelerated as the nation plunged toward disaster and captivity. The national mourning involved the entire *land* of Israel (Heb. *ha eretz*; Gr. *he gê*). Each *tribe* of Israel would *mourn*, tribe by tribe (LXX: *katà fulàs fulàs*). Then he names the royal and religious authorities of Israel, the house of David and the family of Levi, whose loss is selected for special notice in that their lineal descendants stand for the Messianic line and the Priesthood respectively. Finally, Zechariah affirms that *all the tribes* remaining would also join in the national grief. Jerusalem particularly but also all of Israel would weep over her King who came to save His people (Zech. 9:9) but was valued at thirty pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12). Although He was Himself deity, He would be pierced (Zech. 12:11) and His flock scattered (Zech. 13:7).

Jesus’ allusion, then, cannot be to pagan clans scattered throughout the inhabited earth, but specifically to the stricken tribes of the ancient people of God, the Jews who inhabited *the land* of Israel. Now, while this prophecy would find immediate fulfillment during Jesus’ own suffering (John 19:37; Luke 23:27ff., 48), He affirms that the time would come when the Jews would once again grieve bitterly.

NOTE: their mourning is not even primarily connected with Jesus’ Second Coming, as some interpret Revelation 1:7, but must find

direct connection with His suffering during His first coming (John 19:37). If John rightly applies Zechariah 12:10 to Christ's crucifixion, he proves that reference to the Second Coming is not the only appropriate fulfillment and one's interpretation of Revelation 1:7 must take this fact into account.

While some assume that the mourning arises out of all sinners' recognition that Jesus has personally returned to be their implacable Judge, this conclusion is less likely than two more probable alternatives, both of which express Zechariah's full concept:

1. Godly sorrow leads to genuine repentance (II Cor. 7:8-11; Consider Luke 23:48 and John 19:37 in the light of Acts 2:37-41). In the fulfillment, those who were deeply convicted of their guilt of rejecting their long-awaited Messiah, turned to the great Sin-bearer, Jesus, mourning their sinfulness and were graciously saved by His Gospel in time. (Cf. Zech. 12:10; 13:1.)
2. Hopeless mourning is that wordly grief that merely regrets wasted opportunities and bad results but leads to no moral decision to submit to Jesus and ends only in death (II Cor. 7:10). In the fulfillment, those Jews who continue obstinately in their unbelief and rejection of Jesus, would shriek with despair, because unwilling to change their past and unable to alter the consequences of their unbelief. It is striking that, in 70 A.D., Israel permanently lost all hope for her royal house (DAVID) and her entire sacrificial system of purification before God (LEVI) in one blow.

Jesus' time connection is highly revealing: when *the sign of the Son of man in heaven appears*, then will Israel mourn, as if the cause of their desperation and sorrow were the appearing of the sign. The connection is clear: those who assassinated God's Son would live to see the day when He would be gloriously vindicated and the resultant heinousness of their crime against Him appropriately exposed and punished. Further, in Jesus' context, their grief may also be occasioned by the "shaking of the powers of the heavens" (24:29). If by that phrase He meant the collapse of their once glorious system whereby Israel bore the light of God in pagan darkness, then the definitive loss of this exalted, unique institution must provoke deep mourning in all those who profoundly felt this grave loss. But Jesus does not leave them in ignorance about the true motive of their grief. This is revealed in further fulfillment of prophecy.

And they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Because Jesus indicated no time sequence between this declaration and the preceding, as if the event involved followed it, we are free to consider this sentence as an expansion of His earlier phrase, *the sign of the Son of man in heaven*, which, when seen, caused *the tribes of the land to mourn*. The words, *Son of man* and *heaven*, naturally suggest this connection.

When Mark and Luke report only this phrase without mentioning *the sign*, they are only being less explicit than Matthew. They correctly quoted Jesus' words which summarize Daniel 7:13f., and must not be understood as promising a personal appearance in the skies. Matthew is more precise in that he first indicates that men would behold the appearance of a sign that Jesus Christ now reigns in heaven. Then, in harmony with Mark and Luke, our author quotes the prophetic words that define the content of that sign. So, we interpret the less explicit statements of Mark and Luke in light of the fuller citations of Jesus' words by Matthew, not vice versa.

Because *the tribes of the earth* indicated in the citation from Zechariah are the Jewish people, it is principally, although not exclusively, *they* who *shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven*. So, if the primary focus is on carnal Israel's seeing this reality and mourning because of it, what more significant realization could be imagined in all history than when all of unbelieving Israel gathered together in the land as a nation for one last fatal assembly before its final, millennial dispersion, i.e. at the Passover of 70 A.D.? This restriction of time and place would exclude the Second Coming as its primary fulfillment.

Once again Jesus adopted well-known Old Testament phraseology to express His own concepts (Dan. 7:9-14). Daniel dreamed he saw God as a great, venerable Old Man seated on a throne of judgment. This tribunal was to be held in the era of the fourth great world empire (Dan. 7:15-27). Even though the full implications of what occurred then would not be fully realized until Final Judgment, something began that would transform world history. In fact, onto the stage before the throne there came "one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence." Observe: *the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven* WAS NOT APPROACHING EARTH, BUT THE

THRONE OF THE ALMIGHTY. In Daniel's vision, *coming on the clouds* means that the Son of man was coming onstage, into the scene. It is not a *coming* toward Daniel or toward earth, but a *coming* seen from the standpoint of God, since Daniel uses three verbs that all indicate this: "coming . . . approached . . . was led to" the Ancient One. This is no picture of the Second Coming, because *the Son of man* is going the wrong way for that. His face is turned, not toward earth, but toward God. His goal is not to receive His saints, but to receive His Kingdom. (Cf. I Peter 3:22; Luke 19:12; Acts 2:32-36; 3:22; 5:31; Col. 3:1; Rev. 3:21.) Daniel continued (7:14),

He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Jesus summarized this verse by describing the coming of the Son of man *with power and great glory*.

The TIME indicated by Daniel for this transfer of imperial power from the domain of world monarchs to that of the Kingdom of the Son of man and of the saints of God, was after the rise of the fourth great world empire, Rome. (Cf. Dan. 2:44; 7:17f.) This coincides with Jesus' other time notices, as His disciples must expect to "see the Son of man coming in His kingdom" during their lifetime, an appearance which would unquestionably prove "the kingdom of God come with power" (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1). This time-frame is repeated in this discourse too (24:34; cf. 23:36).

So, Jesus' use of Daniel's imagery implies that Israel would see the day when Daniel's words must apply most clearly and meaningfully to Himself, i.e. when His own divine authority would be vindicated beyond all doubt. But there arises a natural question: how would skeptical Jews be convinced of this conclusion? How could anyone trace a cause/effect relationship between Christ's invisible, heavenly sentences (cause) and earthly events (effect)? Further, the expression, *they shall see*, would seem fatal to any INVISIBLE "coming of the Son of man on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"! However, three facts must be reckoned with:

1. Christ's Kingdom and rule is not some future aspiration, but a present reality.
2. Christ need not be visible to manifest His authority on earth.
3. Christians, too, will see and comprehend Christ's triumph.

## CHRIST REIGNS NOW

Indisputably, our participation in "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" is yet future (Acts 14:22; II Tim. 4:18; II Peter 1:11). Nevertheless, His rule is not merely future aspiration, but a present reality. (See my Special Study on the Kingdom, Vol. III, 160ff.) That His rule has already begun and does not await some distant date is fact.

1. He possessed universal authority even before His ascension (11:27; 12:28; 28:19; John 5:21-29; 17:2). Was this merely nominal, unsubstantial, fictitious or true authority?
2. His coming in His Kingdom occurred in the lifetime of the Apostles (16:28; Mark 9:1). On Pentecost men submitted to His Lordship (Acts 2:33-36) and were transferred out of Satan's realm into "the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1:13). Believers preached (Acts 20:25) and suffered for His Kingdom in the first century (Rev. 1:9).
3. Christ's rule is carried on from God's heavenly throne (Eph. 1:20ff.; Heb. 1:3).
4. Christ's Kingdom was given to humble, teachable disciples (18:3f.; 19:14; 21:31f.; Luke 12:32; 22:29f.). Being not of this world, His Kingdom is no threat to the proper exercise of civil authority (John 18:36).
5. His Kingdom must continue until every enemy is destroyed (Heb. 2:14f.; 10:12f.; I John 3:8; I Cor. 15:24-28).
6. His sovereignty is partially expressed in the earthly warfare of His saints against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places, but with spiritual, not material, weapons (Eph. 6:10ff.; II Cor. 10:3-6) and with spiritual results (I John 5:4, 5; John 16:33).

That Christ's Kingdom will become undeniably evident at the Final Judgment is unquestioned and is probably the splendid climax and final fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. What is here affirmed, rather, is that even now the Son of God rules, judges, raises up and casts down whomever He will, and that this Kingdom, however invisible or intangible, is not unreal, impractical, insignificant or powerless.

## CHRIST'S REIGN NEED NOT BE VISIBLE TO BE REAL

Some assume that *they shall see . . .*, means that for Jesus to come on the clouds or to reign on earth, He must be visible. If such an

invisible Kingdom seem impractical, unreasonable or unworthy of divine government, let God's mighty, historical judgments on the world's nations, empire and kings testify. They are not uninstructional (Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:11; II Tim. 3:14-17).

1. How has God manifested His presence to men to make His reality recognizable to them? He presented Himself visibly in physical form to Abraham (Gen. 18) or to Moses as "the angel of the Lord" (Exod. 3:2-5) or to others in vision (Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:25ff.; 3:23; 10:18f.; 11:23). These unquestionably real self-revelations, however, do not exclude another mode whereby God manifested Himself to men. Is a visible presence essential to fulfill the requirements of the following texts: Genesis 11:5f.; I Samuel 3:10; 5:1-12; 6:5? Did the burning bush experience of Moses or the pillar of fire exhaust the meaning of God's affirmation: "I am come down to deliver" (Exod. 3:8)? Was He not raining down plagues on Egypt, defeating the cream of Pharaoh's army and working mighty miracles for Israel, even without a visible, physical presence? The complaining Israelites could still snarl, "Is the Lord among us or not" (Exod. 17:7)? His was not a material apparition but a nevertheless real leadership by His Holy Spirit (Isa. 63:10-14). Was His fellowship less real to believers merely because it was spiritual and invisible? (Contrast Isa. 42:19f.)
2. How did God manifest His presence at the national and international level to convict men of His sovereignty? What did man see?
  - a. One major prophetic emphasis of Ezekiel's message is to communicate God's self-revelation by means of a series of events undeniably evident in world history, whereby all who ever heard of these facts could recognize that these incidents were no mere chance occurrences, but nothing less than the carefully planned activity of a sovereign, living God.
    - (1) 34 times God concludes a threatened punishment upon Israel, affirming, "I will stretch out my hand against them and make the land a desolate waste . . . *Then they will know that I am the Lord . . . then you will know that it is I the Lord who strikes the blow*" (Ezek. 2:5; 5:13ff.; 6:7, 10, 13f.; 7:4, 9, 27; 11:10, 12; 12:15f., 20; 13:9, 14, 21, 23; 14:8; 15:7; 17:21, 24; 20:38, 44, 48; 21:5; 22:16, 22; 23:49; 24:24, 27; 33:29, 33).
    - (2) 26 times God threatens foreign powers with punishment so that they too "will know that I am the Lord" (Ezek. 25:5,

- 7, 11, 14, 17; 26:6; 28:22ff.; 29:6, 9, 16; 30:8, 19, 25f.; 32:15; 35:4, 9, 12, 15; 38:16, 23; 39:6f., 21).
- (3) 12 times God concluded a promised blessing of Israel whereby they could easily discern God's hand in earthly events and "*know that I am the Lord*" (Ezek. 16:62; 17:24; 28:26; 29:21; 34:27, 30; 36:11, 38; 37:6, 13f.; 39:28).
  - (4) God described the Gentile nations' punishment so that its realization would convince Israel to "*know that I the Lord have spoken*" (Ezek. 35:11; 39:21f.).
  - (5) God's restoration of Israel must convince Gentiles that Jahweh is the true God of heaven and Israel's God (Ezek. 36:23, 36, 38).
- b. GOD'S CLEARLY-DEFINED PATTERN OF SELF-REVELATION IN HISTORY'S EVENTS:
- (1) GOD ANNOUNCED HIS PLANS BEFOREHAND as adequate forewarning, so men could look forward to the realization of what was beyond human power to foresee or forestall (Isa. 14:26f.; 19:12; 37:20-37; 41:20-29; 42:9; 45:19ff.; 48:14f.).
  - (2) THEN GOD DID WHAT HE SAID HE WOULD (Isa. 30:30ff.; 42:23ff.; 44:7f.; 48:3; 64:1-4).
  - (3) Because the news was also to be announced to all nations (Isa. 48:20), men could draw the correct conclusion: what God says, He will do. His rule is real and His will must be obeyed in other areas too (Isa. 17:7f.; 19:19-25; 24:14; 43:12f.; 45:1-6, 14; 48:3-7, 16; 49:23, 26; 52:6; 54:15ff.).
- c. Thus, God's mighty acts in history were not merely to punish or bless either Israel or the nations, but to lead all men, Jews and Gentiles alike, to confess that Israel's God is the only truly self-existent, eternal, living God, who alone is worthy of adoration and service. Israel was to learn that it was Jahweh who struck them, not merely some pagan foreign power, so they would return to Him (Isa. 9:13; Jer. 5:3). There was no supernatural exhibition of God's person in the skies over Israel or Jerusalem when He poured out His wrath on them. Nevertheless, from the outcome of the events, His people were to draw the necessary conclusion that the LORD HIMSELF directed those remedial chastisements (cf. Joel 2:11). They were to conclude that punishments like the sacking of Jerusalem and the burning of the Temple furnish irrefutable evidence that "a great day of the

Lord has come.” (Cf. Isa. 2:12-22; Amos 5:18ff.; Zeph. 1:7ff., 14f.; 2:2f.) THIS WAS A CONCLUSION THEY WERE TO DRAW, foreannounced indeed by prophets, but not an affirmation written in flaming letters across the sky nor thundered from heaven. This they could DEDUCE as the Babylonian war machine, for example, rolled into the beleaguered Holy City to pillage, slaughter and burn. But this was a CONCLUSION well-grounded in many prophecies that guided Israel to read their destiny aright, even if in the light of the flames that consumed their last hope of reprieve from divine justice. (Cf. Jer. 5:19.)

3. Merely because one cannot discern God’s Kingdom materially visible does not constitute proof that it does not exist or has somehow failed. The above-cited references often allude to God’s hand stretched out over a given people to punish it. But who seriously believes that a gigantic fist appeared in the sky over them to smash them for their sins? To the contrary, the prophets sometimes indicate which specific, quite earthly enemy power would be God’s appointed instrument, be they some great empire or the marauding desert tribes, or even Israel herself (Ezek. 25:4, 14; 26:7; 30:24f.; 32:11f.; 29:19f.; cf. Jer. 51:11; I Chron. 5:26; 21:16). In the colossal shifts in imperial power in the ancient Near East God established His sovereignty as Lord of history (Dan. 2:21, 44). This lesson was so clear that even a Nebuchadnezzar could understand it (Dan. 4:3, 34ff.). On some occasions, because of a direct revelation, earth’s monarchs were brought to their knees before God’s universal dominion (Dan. 2:47; 3:28f.; 4:28-37; 5:18-21; 6:25ff.). At other times God overthrew thrones and established justice despite the evil intentions of the human agents He used. (Cf. Isa. 10:5-19, 24ff.; 13:5; 14:24-29; 30:30ff.; 31:8f.; 38:6; Jer. 51:20ff., 27ff.; Mic. 4:11f.). These acts of God were to convince Israel that God’s servant, Nebuchadnezzar, for example, was nothing more nor less than God’s tool operating at the level of empire (Isa. 44:28; Jer. 25:9-14; 46:10). In Israel or elsewhere only the crass unbeliever could pout, “But I expected something different, something more psychologically convincing, some more spectacular evidence of God’s reality and sovereignty!”
4. Just as God ruled men from heaven without personally and visibly directing history’s traffic from some mountain top, overthrowing thrones and shattering the power of kingdoms (cf. I Chron. 29:11f.; Hag. 2:2f.), so everything Jesus was doing was intended to produce

the conviction in the dispassionate observer that Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus followed the same model established by God: He forewarned of Jerusalem's fall. Then He brought it to pass. Thus, men could conclude that the Crucified One sits on the Throne at the center of the universe, that He has indeed *come on the clouds of heaven*, and shall come again, as He said.

Must His reign seem less real, just because it too is invisible? Can we believe it to function effectively, even if He is not seated on a golden, Davidic throne in Jerusalem (John 18:36)? Merely because we cannot observe His reigning, must we repeat the ancient slander: "Is the Lord among us or not" (Exod. 17:7)? Proponents of millennial theories that require a messianic throne of David in Jerusalem appear to be dissatisfied with a spiritual kingdom, as if its spiritual character somehow compromises its reality and power. All must learn to live with Jesus' promise: "I will be with you always, to the very close of the age" (28:20). Rather than confirm His word by appearing bodily after His departure, He sent His Spirit to be with us and in us. Significantly, it was in a context such as Ezekiel's five apologetic defenses mentioned above, that God's promise to send His Spirit arises. So, if God approaches earth to re-organize its inhabitants any way He chooses but needs no visible, material body to accomplish this, why must it be thought strange that Jesus Christ need not appear in the sky before earthly judgments can be wrought on the earth by Him?

NOTE: it is not argued here that Jesus' vindication at the fall of Jerusalem is the final or exclusive fulfillment of Daniel's great prophecy. Rather, that any time Christ intervenes, either on behalf of His Church or to punish His enemies, He gives proof of His heavenly reign, vindicates His claims and justifies the faith of His people. Every such intervention may be considered evidence of "*the coming of the Son of man on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*" to the Ancient of Days to rule from His throne until that final Day when, what Christians have believed all along, shall finally break in upon the consciousness of all men, and Daniel's prophecy shall have its final, most glorious fulfillment. (Cf. notes on 10:23 and 16:28.)

### WHO SHALL SEE *THE SON OF MAN COMING*, AND HOW?

It would seem that, according to Matthew, *they will see*, must refer exclusively and contextually, *to all the tribes (who) mourn*, i.e. those

of Israel who rejected God's offer of grace through Jesus. But would those who repudiated Jesus' interpretation of Judaism's fall be psychologically able to admit the Nazarene's complete vindication in the holocaust of 70 A.D.? Although they probably would not grasp this connection, Jesus' expression admits two possible explanations.

1. JEWS WOULD SEE WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING. A child watches two expert chess players move their pieces on the board, without its seeing what the moves mean, while the players themselves not only witness but also experience, recognize and understand what each play means in terms of the past, present and possible future of the game. Similarly, Jews would see Jerusalem, the Temple and its millennial glory going up in flames and the demolition of the entire Mosaic institution for access to God through priesthood, sacrifices and cleansing from sin. But what they could see with their mind, or comprehend, must depend on what they were willing to recognize as the meaning of what they saw. (Cf. Isa. 29:9-12, 14; Acts 3:17; 13:27.) The extent to which they repented and trusted God to judge righteously measured their openness to His revelations (Isa. 32:3). Otherwise, they would see without understanding (cf. 13:11-16; Isa. 6:9f.; 42:18ff.; 53:1; contrast 52:15; Rom. 10:16-19; Heb. 3:7—4:2). Their centuries-old "Wailing Wall mentality" documents their continued incomprehension.
2. CHRISTIANS WOULD SEE AND UNDERSTAND. *They will see*, in Matthew, seems to refer contextually to Israel alone. This phrase, however, is used also by both Mark and Luke who make no specific allusion to anyone in particular, since they omitted all mention of the Jews. Further, the third person plural verb in Greek can be used, as in English, for the indefinite subject: "one will see, anyone in general will see, you will see, etc." (Cf. Blass-Deburnner, *Grammar*, §130.) So, Jesus leaves the door open for not only Jews to see, but also Christians. These latter not only witness the awe-inspiring end of Israel's Temple, but also the dramatic conclusion of the Mosaic dispensation and the historical vindication of Jesus of Nazareth. So, what the Jews witnessed uncomprehendingly, the Christians, looking at the same objects, could see in it what Daniel's images portrayed, *the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven*. Comprehension and true insight were possible only for those who accepted the true meaning of the event as this is perceived on the basis of Jesus' prediction and the empirically observable occurrence of what He had foretold, interpreting everything in the light of Daniel 7:13f. Christians could

grasp the true significance of the decline and fall of Judaism, because they possess the interpretative key to history, handed them by the Lord of History Himself.

### CONCLUSION

The end of the pre-Messianic age and the commencement of the Kingdom of the Messiah coincided theoretically at the Passion, Victory, Ascension and Coronation of the Christ which culminated in Pentecost, 30 A.D. But only a few believers—no more than 300 at first—embraced this change of administration for nearly a generation. Business continued as usual in Judaism. This would lead to the falsely secure notion that all was well. But the sudden, definitive removal of Judaism's commonwealth and its Levitical system and Temple became the signal proof that only Jesus of Nazareth had correctly revealed the mind of God (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Thus, the very crumbling of the Jewish commonwealth, their religious center and its aftermath, just as He prophesied, would attest to Jesus' heavenly reign by His superintending the punitive justice meted out on those who rejected His messiahship and crucified Him, and by His justifying the faith of those who proclaimed Him Lord of all. Both acts of this divine King prove He sits enthroned and rules *with power and great glory*. They prove that He has truly begun to do, concretely and historically, what Daniel's expressions meant: He has already ascended to heaven and come to God on the clouds of heaven to take His place rightfully on God's throne. Jewish silence that finds inexplicable their Temple's 2000-year desolation is tantamount to a confession that God has incomprehensibly abandoned His people and that Israel today has no solid refutation against the claim that the Crucified One has triumphed and is their true Master, despite the fact that they repudiate His Lordship. No longer may fleshly Israel claim unique or exclusive access to God, because Israel's Bible, in the absence of its Messiah, points uncompromisingly to its Levitical sacrifices by which alone this access may be enjoyed. But now that access is denied by the Temple's millennial absence.

No wonder, then, that in 70 A.D. Christians could lift up their heads in hope (Luke 21:28). Christ's people were freed from the ungodly, oppressive sovereignty of Judaism by the execution of the Lord's sentence on it, because in that event it became evident on earth that Jesus' kingship is real. *The Son of man was really in heaven and He had actually come on the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of*

Days and was gloriously crowned with honor and sovereign power, just as Daniel had foretold and Jesus Himself had confirmed! Christ in heaven administers His Kingdom, while His people conquer and reign on earth (Rev. 5:10; cf. 1:6; Rom. 8:37; II Cor. 2:14; I Peter 2:9).

NOTE: None of the above conclusions are intended to detract from the perfect, final realization of Daniel's prophecy, whereby what is now discerned only by believers shall become indisputably evident to everyone at Christ's coming. Nor does this interpretation deny the clearly literal expectations of many other texts that speak of His return on the Final Day (I Thess. 4:16; II Thess. 1:7-10; I Cor. 15; II Peter 3, etc.). Jesus' Kingdom became *de jure* effective at Pentecost (Acts 2), but it was and is only gradually realized *de facto* as His influence spreads throughout the world and more of His enemies are put under His feet. Even so, there remains a sense in which it is still largely a Kingdom *de jure* and shall not be manifest to all of earth's inhabitants in all its glory until the Last Day. Christ's present reign is not inconsistent with the continued presence of evil in the world. (See notes on Matt. 13.) *Revelation* dramatizes the final outcome of this conflict and warns that all present appearances are deceiving that seem to put Christ and Christians' victory in doubt. He really reigns and His people are victors, even though all earthly observation would deny it. What is even now true shall simply be manifest at the Last Day.

#### 4. Worldwide proclamation of the Gospel and its results: the beginning of the Lord's Year of Jubilee (24:31)

24:31 **And he shall send forth 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.** This *sending forth of angels* closely resembles Jesus' interpretation of His own parables of the Tares and of the Dragnet (13:41, 49). Further, *the great sound of a trumpet* seems associated with the last trumpet call of God at the resurrection (I Cor. 15:52; I Thess. 4:16). Notwithstanding these similarities, two considerations suggest that these expressions be otherwise interpreted:

1. Jesus' explicit indications of schedule require a fulfillment within the time-frame of His own contemporary generation (23:35f.; 24:21, 29, 34).

2. Jesus' language utilized symbols already well developed in the Old Testament prophets and in the Law, and, as indicated above, although some of the same symbols may also be used in connection with the Second Coming, nevertheless, it is entirely appropriate that He be thought free to adopt this same language in a sense governed by the time limitations He indicated.

*His angels* (Greek: *àngeloi* = "messengers" generally). Whether such messengers are supernatural or completely human must be decided from the context. Besides the many texts which speak of supernatural agents of God, the following texts illustrate the appropriateness of using *àngeloi* for men: In Matthew 11:10 *àngelos* refers to John the Baptist (= Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27) whereas in Luke 7:24 *àngeloi* refers to some of John's disciples. In Luke 9:52 *àngeloi* refers to emissaries of Jesus. In James 2:25 *àngeloi* describes two spies sent to Jericho. This evidence indicates that the translators' choice to render *àngeloi* with "angels" in our text unnecessarily attributes supernatural nature to these messengers, and this conclusion may safely be re-examined, since our Lord may well have meant His human messengers of which He had spoken earlier in unliteral language (23:34).

*With a great sound of a trumpet*, as texts like Revelation 8, 9 illustrate may have other functions in God's economy besides giving the blast that signals the world's end. The question must ever be asked: what image would Jesus' Jewish audience have received from this expression? In Israel's millennial history, the trumpet was used to give signals to Israel and call the community together (Exod. 19:13, 16, 19; Num. 10:1-7). At the New Moon and on other occasions trumpets were used to signal great national celebrations and feasts (Ps. 81:3). Alarms were sounded to warn of approaching danger (Joel 2:1). However, the trumpet's use at Sinai may not have been merely a signal, but part of the very expression of God's presence and glory, and susceptible of being associated with the new covenant announcement of the Law of Christ, not from Sinai, but from Jerusalem. From its many literal uses its symbolic use is drawn, but which one is intended here?

Among its other uses, the trumpet, as a symbol, would bring to the Jewish Jubilee a trumpet song of the emancipation of Hebrew slaves and of the restoration of alienated property to its true owners, and of a year's vacation from life's toil. In this same vein, Jesus established the keynote of His own ministry, citing Isa. 61:1f. (Luke 4:18f.).

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Then He claimed, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." So doing, He initiated the great spiritual era of freedom, rest and restoration. With His own trumpet blast He announced that the time of deliverance had come. Then, as He sent forth His heralds to proclaim this same dispensation of God's grace now available to all in the Gospel, these messengers (*angeloi*) but echoed the Jubilee trumpet's function to "proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants."

However, it would appear that Jesus selected a *great sound of a trumpet* from a figure used by Isaiah 27:13, where God promised to gather His exiled people who were perishing in captivity. Note the comparisons:

JESUS	ISAIAH
The Son of man shall send forth his angels	The Lord will thresh
with a great sound of a trumpet they shall gather his elect	In that day a great trumpet will sound You, O Israelites, will be gathered one by one
from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other	Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

The only element not mentioned in both texts is *his angels*, although the passive ("you will be gathered" in Isaiah) suggests an agent of some kind.

Several points should be noted:

1. This was no literal trumpet. Rather, because it was already a well-known symbol of Israel's jubilee release, Isaiah seems to have spiritualized the Jubilee trumpet to signal a new epoch of glorious release from bondage to pagan powers.
2. Even in Isaiah, this trumpet is no merely human signal, but the summons symbolically sounded by God or by His agents (Cf. Isa. 18:3; 11:12), to call penitent exiles back to Jerusalem to resume their worship and service to Him. (Cf. Joel 2:15f.; Ps. 81:3.)

3. The trumpet-call would produce a restoration to their original sanctification as the people would thresh out grain and collect the kernels individually in the most careful manner possible into a container, so God would separate the grain, the penitent, from the husks, their ungodly brethren yet living among pagan nations.

Jesus apparently reworked Isaiah's literary image to project the vision of an even more glorious trumpet to publish the year of release, not limited to the Jews or to the land of Palestine, but good tidings of great joy for all peoples. He would inaugurate a Jubilee of return and redemption for all nations, which is His next point.

**They shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.** Again His language strikingly resembles His own mode of describing the Final Judgment (13:41-43, 48-50; II Thess. 1:7ff.). Nevertheless, this prophetic language appears to have been borrowed from Moses and Zechariah. Surprisingly, nothing actually celestial is alluded to in *one end of heaven to the other*. In fact, Zechariah (2:6) quotes the Lord as calling, "Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north, for I have scattered you *to the four winds of heaven*." This idiom is only natural, since God had promised compassion on the exiles thus:

If any of thine outcasts be in the uttermost parts of heaven, from thence will Jehovah thy God gather thee and from thence will he fetch thee (Deut. 30:4, ASV).

What is meant less figuratively is their restoration from banishment "to the most distant land under the heavens" (Deut. 30:4, NIV). It is everywhere assumed that these would be flesh-and-blood exiles walking on earth, not disembodied spirits floating in from some distant point in space. (Cf. Neh. 1:9.)

Borrowing this prophetic terminology, Jesus could depict the sounding of the Gospel proclamation which would "gather the true Israel of God from the far reaches of the world and unite them in the worship of Jehovah in . . . the real and abiding Zion (the church), not the earthly and passing Jerusalem" (Butler, *Isaiah*, II, 54). The messengers (*angels*) of Christ are commissioned to "go into all the world, making disciples of all the nations" (28:19f.), a process which proposes to gather God's Elect, His Church, *from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*. (Cf. 8:11; Luke 13:29.) Our Gospel proclaims deliverance and redemption from the oppressive slavery to sin, available to every creature. (Mark 16:15). This liberation encapsules the profoundest meaning of Jubilee. God's elect are no longer drawn from

one small nation, but are composed of people from every tribe, nation, people and tongue. This text, then, points to the grand, non-national, worldwide character of the New Israel and how it came to be.

So, when did the trumpet actually sound: during the ministry of Christ (Luke 4:17ff.)? with the Gospel proclamation of the acceptable year of the Lord, as Jesus' messengers went through the land sounding the Gospel trumpet of release from bondage to Satan? or with the destruction of Jerusalem which formally and finally announced the final end of the Old Dispensation? Ideally, all three, because what occurred in the Gospel preaching by the early Christians and what took place at Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was nothing but the extension of the royal authority and ministry of Jesus Himself. To the world these mighty acts announced Gospel redemption. Also our slavery to Judaistic legalism was now surpassed by a Gospel for every man and people which proclaims liberation to everyone. This fact became concretely obvious when the last vestiges of the Old Dispensation indisputably crumbled to the ground in flames. But it is not impossible that the final Trumpet (I Thess. 4:16), while presumably literal, may be but the last, most glorious expression of God's merciful trumpet to publish eternal release, restoration and redemption. (Study Lev. 25; Zech. 14, esp. vv. 16ff.)

### WHEN TRAGIC EVENTS ARE ACTUALLY REASSURING

*Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near* (Luke 21:28). Jesus introduces these words to conclude this section and yet their meaning is echoed in the parable of the trees which follows, and to which this verse serves as introduction. This verse, then, looks both ways:

1. It prepares the mind to hear Jesus say, "When you see all these things taking place, you can tell that the kingdom of God is near." You will live to see it.
2. It summarizes what the believing observer is to decide about the tremendous, earth-shaking events Jesus has just described in the previous verses, which must mean exclusively the destruction of Jerusalem. That Jesus is not here alluding to the Second Coming is clear
  - a. Because *when these things begin to take place* implies a certain gradualness that permits time for reflection on the world events

just described (Luke 21:25f.). But the Second Coming will be marked by an unexpected, unpredictable suddenness (Matt. 24:39, 42, 44; 25:13).

- b. Because *Look up and raise your heads*, when referred to the Second Coming, is also meaningless, for Christ's return will be announced by heavenly shouting, trumpet music and Jesus' own glorious, personal appearance (I Thess. 4:16). It will all be so obvious as to require no special announcements (Matt. 24:23ff.) or hopeful searching the skies. His appearance will be instantly visible to all; His voice audible to all (II Thess. 1:7-10; John 5:28).
- c. Because the expression, *your redemption is drawing near*, cannot allude to eternal redemption, since this would give time for last-minute preparation. But such convenient, last-minute repentance is absolutely excluded by Jesus' warnings (Matt. 25:1-13). Universal repentance and consequent salvation is inconceivable (Luke 18:8; Matt. 7:13, 14; I Peter 4:12-19). That eternal redemption from sin and all its consequences (I Peter 1:5-9; Rom. 8:23) is not here envisioned is evident from the contextual consideration that Jesus is merely discussing the post-Jewish dispensation when the Gospel would be proclaimed among the Gentiles and the universal Church vindicated as the earthly expression of God's Kingdom. So, *redemption*, here, refers to the near approach to the Church's liberation by those earthly events which would signal the arrival of Christ's Kingdom (Luke 21:31 = Matt. 24:33).

Jesus' meaning, then, is, *When these things, the earth-shaking events leading up to my heavenly vindication, begin to take place, you, my dear disciples, may then look up and raise your heads bowed down by the severe troubles you suffer at that time, because your redemption from the limitations imposed by the Jewish period of the Church and your liberation from persecution by Jewish authorities is drawing near.*

### HOW JUSTIFY THIS POSITION TAKEN?

While we may be satisfied that this passage makes primary reference to the vindication of Jesus as God's Messiah when the Father furnished convincing proof of Jesus' Lordship and of the justice of His cause during the period immediately successive to the fall of Jerusalem and as a necessary result of this judgment, nevertheless it would be irresponsible to ignore the many striking similarities which other

commentators notice between Jesus' language here and what, in my view, are genuinely end-of-the-world events.

1. The astronomical panorama of changes in our universe (II Peter 3:7, 10, 12). The creation of new heavens and earth (II Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1-5; cf. 6:12f.).
2. The appearance of Jesus Christ in the sky (I Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; II Thess. 2:8; II Tim. 4:1; Titus 2:13).
3. The mourning of those who rejected the truth, the terror of those shaken by the glory of our returning Lord, terrified by the prospect of their damnation (Rev. 6:12-17; cf. 1:7?).
4. The loud trumpet signalling the end, Christ's return and the resurrection (I Cor. 15:52; I Thess. 4:16; cf. Rev. 11:15).
5. The angels sent forth to gather Christ's elect from all over the earth (Matt. 13:41-43, 48-50; II Thess. 1:7ff.).

How explain these remarkable similarities? Does similarity argue identification or that this entire paragraph (Matt. 24:29-31) should be understood exclusively with reference to the Second Coming? While the parallels are many and remarkable, their origin in Old Testament prophetic language warns against strict literalism. On the other hand, we may be perfectly content if our marvelous Lord chooses to bring every one of these prophecies to a surprising, literal fulfillment. However, on what basis can prophecies that refer primarily to events immediately following Jerusalem's fall, be thought to point also to the world's Last Day?

1. One answer is to see in the definitive judgment upon Judaism a symbol foreshadowing the sentencing of the entire world. Thus, while others are mistaken to see only end-of-the-world events in the foreground of Jesus' picture before v. 34, nevertheless it is thought that there may be principles involved here that have a wider application that would extend to Christians living on earth after that event until Jesus comes again. The major objection to this view is the repeated warning of our Lord that, whereas the fall of Jerusalem would be preceded by unmistakable signs of its impending disaster, the coming of Christ and the world's end will not. The nearness of that Day will be undiscernible in every respect (24:36, 42ff., 50; 25:13; Mark 13:33, 35; Luke 21:34). Therefore, what is the purpose of searching for parallels and similarities? At this critical point the two events are not at all similar.
2. Another approach is to recognize in Matthew 24:29-31 a symbolic

panorama of earthly events depicted in typical apocalyptic language coined by and borrowed from the prophets, but which, while having undoubted fulfillment in Jerusalem's demise, may yet occur in all their cosmic literalness at the Lord's return. These cosmic disturbances are characteristic of the theophanies of both history and prophecy of the Old Testament, so why should they not also serve in New Testament history and prophecy as well? Although these suggestions cannot be ruled out categorically, enough evidence has been offered in the verse comments to indicate that Jesus spoke in a meaningful language to people familiar with His terminology. Correct exegesis, therefore, must proceed from the standpoint of what the prophets meant by language which Jesus utilized to communicate His own revelations to minds saturated with His Bible.

Because nothing is lost for the Second Coming, it is simply better to consider Matthew 24:29-31 as expressing the theological results of the end of the Jewish era, leaving the above-mentioned texts free to teach us about Christ's real coming, without our seeking some clue in Matthew 24 to the date of the Parousia when the Lord flatly denied any possible hope of success.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Define "the tribulation of those days." To what days does Jesus refer by "those days"? How had He defined "those days" earlier? (vv. 19-22). Identify "the tribulation" itself: what is a "tribulation"?
2. In what sense is the Coming of the Son of man to be "immediately after the tribulation of those days"? How could all the majestic events Jesus included in this paragraph (24:29ff.) really occur "immediately after" the crises of the tribulation?
3. Locate the Old Testament passages where the following expressions are used and give the interpretation intended by the Old Testament author in each case:
  - a. "The sun shall be darkened, the moon shall not give her light, the stars shall fall from heaven, the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."
  - b. "All the tribes of the earth shall mourn." To what tribes does the prophet refer? To what "earth"? What occasioned their mourning?
  - c. "The Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory": to what or whom was this Son of man "coming"?

when He approached "on the clouds of heaven" in the original reference?

- d. "gather . . . a great trumpet": what was this trumpet used for in the original reference(s)?
  - e. "the four winds of heaven."
4. Now, rewrite Jesus' paragraph using the literal meaning of each phrase as you have gleaned it from the Old Testament prophets. That is, take His figurative language borrowed from the Prophets, and, as if you were writing for people unfamiliar with the Old Testament, express His literal meaning which would have been communicated to His original Jewish hearers familiar with the Old Testament.
  5. Establish with good reasons to what coming of the Son of man Jesus alludes.
  6. True or false? The better translation is "All the tribes of *the land* (not "earth") shall mourn." Defend your answer.
  7. What additional information does Luke add that helps to interpret this section?

#### D. Encouragement to Believe Jesus (24:32-35)

(Parallels: Mark 13:28-31; Luke 21:29-33)

32 Now from the fig tree learn her parable: when her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh; 33 even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that he (footnote: "it") is nigh, *even* at the doors. 34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished. 35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Some interpreters hold that the fig tree is a symbol of the Jewish people, and that the revising of their nation, as symbolized by the renewal of the fig tree, signals the near approach of Christ's Second Coming. Does the fact that Luke's version of this parable speaks not only of the fig tree, but also of "all the trees," modify this view in any way?
- b. In what sense is it correct to affirm that "all these things" that Jesus had described earlier (24:4-31) must be considered as signalling

- the near approach of the Kingdom of God within the lifetime of His contemporaries?
- c. Some people hold that verses 29-31 are referring to Christ's Second Coming. Now, however, Jesus asserts that "all these things" must be accomplished during the lifetime of His own generation. But He did not return in that generation. Who is mistaken: Jesus or His interpreters? How do you know?
  - d. What kind of person is it who thinks that it would be easier for the inexorable natural laws of heaven and earth to fail than for his own affirmations to be proven wrong? What does this tell you about Jesus who made precisely this claim?
  - e. How does Jesus' assertion, that His words shall not pass away, furnish a good reason for believing Him? Do you believe Him?
  - f. Do you believe that His generation lived to see the realization of "all these things," just as He said? If so, why? If not, why not?
  - g. Jesus expects that His disciples would see certain phenomena and be able to decide correctly that the kingdom of God is near. Further, He will teach that the Second Coming will not be heralded by any forewarning, but will come abruptly and unexpectedly for everyone. How do these facts clarify Jesus' meaning about the phenomena and modify our understanding of it?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then Jesus told them a story: "Think of the fig tree—in fact, look at any tree and learn its lesson. As soon as its branches become tender and its leaves come out, you can see without being told that summer is not very far away. Similarly, when you see ALL THESE THINGS taking place, you can recognize that the Kingdom of God is near and ready to make its triumphal entry. I can tell you for sure that this present generation will live to see it all take place. Heaven and earth will come to an end, but what I have said . . . never!"

### SUMMARY

In the same way that leaves signal the approach of summer, clues already mentioned signal the arrival of God's Kingdom, an event which must occur during the lifetime of Jesus' contemporaries. The universe could fall apart sooner than Jesus' words fail to be fulfilled.

## NOTES

## 1. Leaves are a signal of summer's approach (24:32)

**24:32 Learn from the fig tree her parable.** Even as He spoke, Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives. Back of them, as they faced Jerusalem, lay a small village called "Fig-Town," or Bethphage. (Cf. 21:1; Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29.) Not unlikely it drew its name from the abundance of its fig trees. Because Jesus pronounced these words just before Passover, the fig trees would even then be leafing out. (See notes on 21:19.) Because Jesus said, "and all the trees" (Luke 21:29), this parable is not essentially about *fig trees* exclusively, but, rather, about how trees in general function and about what this function tells the nature observer about the seasons. By showing His disciples something with which they were already familiar, something which also involved their ability to predict the approach of summer with reasonable certainty, Jesus facilitated their understanding of something less familiar.

**When her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh.** This shows His disciples that to predict the near approach of whatever phase of God's Kingdom Jesus has in mind would not be nearly so difficult or problematic as it might seem in theory. (This is the same approach Jesus had already used with others who could determine the short-term weather forecast from the appearance of the sky. Matt. 16:1-3)

No objective reading of this paragraph (24:32-34) will justify the creation of an allegory of the rebirth of the Jewish state ("Fig tree = Jewish people") without reading into Jesus' words what is not there, to favor a preconceived theory of eschatology. To do so, one must forget that Jesus also said, "and all the trees" (Luke 21:29), since the supposed symbolism would extend to all other races, if each tree stood for a race, as the fig, in theory, stands for the Hebrews. So, the theory topples of its own weight, felled by solid information from Luke.

2. Similarly, the foregoing clues signal H-hour  
for God's Kingdom (24:33)

**24:33 Even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, even at the doors.** Just as surely as budding and leaves were a sure indication of the nearness of the warm season, so the disciple of Jesus could discern the approach of some great event by

the clear signs just listed. The great controversy turns on what is intended by *all these things*, since the decision about WHAT *is nigh* depends largely upon *these things* that indicate its near approach. The problem began with the Greek used by Matthew and Mark, since neither indicated a subject for the verb, *is nigh* (*engûs estin*). This leaves translators torn between "he" and "it," because grammatically both renderings are possible. Luke's specific statement, however, furnished the missing key by informing us that Jesus meant; "the Kingdom of God is near." Because Jesus said it, therefore, this concept should be read into Matthew's narrative as the subject *it*, as found in the ASV margin and in other translations. But, even so, because Jesus' Kingdom is a Messianic Kingdom on earth, wherever His Kingdom is, there is He in the midst of it (18:20; 28:20; Luke 17:21). Now, the riddle becomes: to what phase of the Kingdom of God does Jesus refer?

1. Some point to 24:4-28 and suppose He means just the fall of Jerusalem. It is assumed that He temporarily overlooks what appears to be the Second Coming in 24:29-31 and points back to the events mentioned earlier, i.e. Jerusalem's destruction. But this involves two exegetical weaknesses:
  - a. This view must apply "all these things" to events in a more distant context while shutting an eye to the Second Coming supposedly mentioned in the nearer context.
  - b. Consequently, this view must deny that Jesus' allusions in 24:29-31 perfectly mirror the classic style of Old Testament prophets before Him, and contrary to these prophets' own interpretations, consider their words literal when used by Jesus.
2. Others suppose He means the state of affairs commencing at the Second Coming when Christ's rule shall be universally acknowledged. This view is supported by these suppositions:
  - a. *All these things* is thought to refer only to the signs mentioned in 24:29-31, taken to mean Christ's coming in glory at the end of the world. However, see our notes on these verses which treat them as expressing the spiritual significance of the period immediately following Jerusalem's fall and directly resulting from it.
  - b. Some suppose the fig tree parable is to be connected with Jesus' cursing of the fruitless fig tree (21:18f.), bespeaking the punishment of the unfruitful Jewish race. Hence, they see its resurrection from national and spiritual dormancy just before the world's end,

symbolized by the flowering of the fig tree. However, there is no evidence that Jesus created such a symbol as "fig tree = Israel."

- c. "This generation" (v. 34) is supposed to embrace only the Jewish race. Hence, what is affirmed about "this generation," becomes a prediction of Israel's continuance as a race until the Second Coming. However, see our objections at 24:34.
- d. Consequently, it is concluded that Jesus could not have included literally *all these things*, from the disciples' question, "Tell us when will *these things* be," down to "when you see *all these things*" (24:3-33). Accordingly, He omitted all reference here to the overthrow of Jerusalem. Ironically, this view's proponents often take everything in 24:29-31 literally, but balk at treating *all these things* and *this generation*, with the same measure of literalness. Worse, because *all these things* are thought to be the signs that precede the Second Coming and signal its approach, these commentators make Jesus party to two errors:
- (1) He is pictured as predicting His return "immediately after" the fall of Jerusalem. (Cf. 24:29). To avoid this gaffe one must eviscerate "immediately" of its usual meaning, assigning it a "modified sense," defended by reference to II Peter 3:4-9. However, Peter clearly refers to the *parousia* of Christ, where Jesus does not use this word in our immediate text. (See on 24:29-31.)
  - (2) Jesus is caused to contradict Himself, being made to speak of signs foreshadowing an event for which He specifically revealed there would be no advance warning.
- e. This viewpoint ignores the main point of Jesus' affirmation. The very appearance of all the signs He mentioned intend to forewarn of the nearing of the great event. If a sign is truly functional, it is to alert the observer for the near advent of that great event as surely as the budding of the trees announces the arrival of summer. But if these events which supposedly signal the nearness of Christ's return have come and gone century after century from the days of the disciples to our own, and yet the Second Coming has never occurred, then Christ's return is simply not the event heralded by the supposed signs in question. When Jesus gave true signs, He referred to something else, the fall of Jerusalem (24:14-28). Further, what was commonly mistaken for signs (4:4-13), He flatly ruled out as indicative of anything precisely because of their very ordinary commonness.

3. The more appropriate view is that which permits Jesus to say anything He wants to, regardless of what this does to our theories. On the surface, as all commentators who have struggled with the apparent incongruities in Jesus' expression, admit, He seems to include in His phrase, *all these things*, everything He has been saying since He started answering the disciples' question, i.e. in 24:4-33. So be it! To the question whether *all these things* really did occur within the time-span of one generation, may be given a hearty, positive answer.

- a. The Gospel of the Kingdom was preached in all the world (Col. 1:6, 23; see on 24:14).
- b. Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, but the Christians fled anyway (Luke 21:20; see on 24:15).
- c. National Israel was demolished in a disastrous war that desolated the Temple, the priesthood and the royal Davidic house (24:19-22). Israel could not but wail bitterly thereat.
- d. Jesus' rightful claims to divine authority were completely vindicated (Dan. 7:13f.; Eph. 1:20ff.; see on Matt. 24:30f.). He transferred the Kingdom from Israel to another people who would bring forth the fruits thereof (21:43). When the barren Jewish institution was finally crushed, believers could discern in it that the mighty "stone the builders rejected" had now become the Capstone (21:42, 44; Luke 20:18). It also crushed its opponents.
- e. God's elect were really gathered from the four winds by His messengers. (See on 23:34; 24:31.)
- f. All of this gives evidence that the Sovereign God who revealed Himself in Jesus of Nazareth rules supreme. This is the expression of the Kingdom of God alluded to here. (See the Special Study on "the Coming of the Son of Man," my Vol. II, 430ff.; and on "The Kingdom of God," my Vol. III, 160ff.)

### 3. All these events must occur in Jesus' generation (24:34)

24:34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished. *Generation*, in Scripture, refers to:

1. The successive elements in a genealogy (Matt. 1:17).
2. The people living at the same time (Matt. 23:36; 24:34; Luke 17:25).
3. A people or class distinguished by shared qualities, usually in a bad sense in the New Testament (Matt. 17:17; Mark 8:38).

4. The average lifetime of a person, an age. (Cf. Col. 1:26.)
5. Figuratively, a measurement of eternity (Eph. 3:21).

In these usages the shared root meaning is the concept of contemporaries of the people involved in a *generation*. Were it not for prior commitments to a particular eschatological view, the common reader would understand Jesus to mean that His own contemporaries would live to witness the great events He predicted. This is the correct view, because it is sustained by the following considerations:

1. THE PROPHETIC FULFILLMENT ITSELF. A *generation* is usually considered to cover a period of roughly forty years. If the surest interpretation of a prophecy is to be sought in its undoubted fulfillment, then the fact that every event that Jesus predicted took place roughly forty years after He prophesied it, i.e. from 30-70 A.D., is corroborative evidence that He spoke literally here. (See notes on 24:29-31.)
2. THE APOLOGETIC AIM. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 351) saw that this discourse, known and preached by Jewish Christians, had special, evidential importance for that *generation*, as it

contained in itself a challenge to that generation of Jews to watch the course of events in their own national history, and to say whether its predictions proved true or false. No generation has lived that was so competent to expose a failure had it occurred, or that would have done so more eagerly. But the events, as they transpired, turned the prophecy into history, and demonstrated the foreknowledge of Jesus.

Through His own apostles and prophets (23:34; Luke 11:49f.), He addressed this crucial message, not just to any then-future generation, but to *this generation*. The Apostles themselves and those of their own generation who would see the beginning of these things (24:33), would also be part of the generation that would witness the end (24:34; cf. 16:28; Mark 9:1 with Luke 21:31f.).

3. THE LINGUISTIC CONSIDERATION. Matthew's own use of *generation* (*genèd*) outside of 24:24 indicates how our author normally understood the word in question:
  - a. Four times in Jesus' genealogy, he uses *genèd* to mean "the people composing successive steps in a family lineage (1:17).
  - b. In 11:16 Jesus not only spoke of an obtuse attitude, but was addressing the fickle, unreasonable people living in His own time who showed it.

- c. In 12:39, 41, 42, 45 and 16:4 Jesus reacted to His contemporaries' unjust demands for further miraculous proof of His authority, despite the abundance of evidence already granted, terming them "an evil, adulterous generation." But it was to *this generation* that He personally gave the crowning credential, the sign of Jonah. His contemporaries must answer in the Judgment for their rejection of Him who by His resurrection was fully authenticated as God's Spokesman.
  - d. In 17:17 Jesus bemoaned the perversity of unbelief shown by the very people with whom He must continue to live, tolerating their bad attitude, i.e. His contemporaries.
  - e. In 23:36 His context conclusively clarifies His reference. He points not merely to a wicked attitude, but primarily to THE PEOPLE THEN LIVING as opposed to all preceding generations. "The sons," as distinguished from "your fathers," are those to whom He would send His messengers and upon whom would come His threatened judgment. While *this generation* did not personally slay Zechariah, it does not follow that the whole Jewish race is alluded to. Rather, Jesus affirmed that His own contemporaries shared the spirit of those who murdered that prophet in their own era, but He was not hereby re-defining *generation* so as to include their predecessors.
  - f. Nowhere does Matthew utilize *generation (genea)* to refer exclusively to the entire Jewish race in a bloc, as a race.
4. THE NEAR CONTEXT. *All these things* that must occur in Jesus' generation (24:34) refer to *all these things* that indicate the arrival of God's Kingdom (24:33; Luke 21:31). His reference, then, is broader, reaching back to sum up everything discussed earlier. He had threatened the desolation of Israel's great "house" by divine retribution of His generation (23:34-39). Pointing to the Temple, He reworded this menace, "You see *all these things* . . . ? There will not be left one stone upon another . . ." (24:2). His men questioned Him, "Tell us, when will *these things* be?" (24:3). Then, Jesus sketched a panorama of general world conditions and specific Church problems characteristic of that period. Expressing Himself both literally and figuratively, He listed salient features of the last days of the Jewish State, and concluded, "Now when *these things* begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). Summarizing with His fig tree parable, He uses this cumulative argument:

“When you see *all these things* (worldwide Gospel proclamation, 24:14, 31; Jerusalem surrounded by armies, 24:15; Luke 21:20; the destruction of the Temple, 24:2; the devastation of the Jewish State and its institutions, 24:15-28; during an era troubled by trials, turbulence and tragedy, 24:4-13, 29; and the glorious vindication of the Son of man, 24:30f.), then know that the Kingdom of God is near.” So, *all these things* embraces everything in 24:2-34.

5. THE LARGER CONTEXT. According to Luke 17:25, the suffering and rejection of Jesus by *this generation* must precede the long-awaited unveiling of the Messiah in His true glory. This clearly refers to the Jewish nation then living whose leadership and majority following would finally repudiate Jesus as their Christ. That *this generation* must point to His era, but not to His race, is evident. Otherwise the rejection of Jesus would involve ALL JEWS down to His Coming and the hypothesis of any final conversion of all Israel must be abandoned by its proponents.
6. THE QUESTION OF CONSISTENCY. Does Jesus contradict Himself? If He were promising His Second Coming during His contemporary generation, verses 34 and 36 would be mutually contradictory. It does not follow that, because the early Christians “could not possibly have continued to wait for Him, when Israel was not converted and Christ did not come, therefore they cannot have so understood the words in the sense merely of the generation then living” (Biederwolf, 348). On the contrary, the trouble lies in wrongly assuming that Jesus was discussing His Return, when He really contemplated the earthly events that manifested His heavenly reign during the first century. So, those early disciples, because they were culturally prepared to interpret His words more accurately than most moderns, could have well understood His words in the sense of “the generation then living.” What is mistaken, rather, is the expectation that *this generation* must last until the Second Coming or that all Israel must be converted *en masse*. (See on 23:39.)
7. JESUS’ GENERAL TIME-TABLE. That *this generation* corresponds to Jesus’ contemporaries is corroborated by 16:28 where He promised the majestic manifestation of His Kingdom during the lifetime of His disciples. Similarly, Luke places that same appearance during the lifetime of *this generation* (Luke 21:31, 32; cf. Luke 9:27). Jesus warned that the final crisis of Jerusalem would occur during the lifetime of men, women and children who even then inhabited

that city, (Luke 19:41-44; 23:27-31). Can it be seriously doubted that He had in mind the invasion and siege by the Romans in 70 A.D.?

### CAN GENERATION MEAN "RACE" HERE?

Because Jesus often gave a negatively loaded flavor to the expression, *this generation*, it is thought to refer exclusively to that entire sector of the Jews that rejected Him. Ignoring the Jewish Christians, such interpreters extend the meaning potential of this phrase to embrace all unconverted Jews generally, then affirm that Jesus wanted to promise the non-extinction of the Jewish race until the Second Coming.

1. Lenski's contention (*Matthew*, 952) is substantially correct that *generation* depicts a certain kind of people whose characteristics are deducible from a given context. (Cf. Ps. 12:7 [LXX 11:8]; 78:8 [LXX 77:8]; but see 78:4, 6! 24:6 [LXX 23:6]; 73:15 [LXX 72:15]; etc.) However, it is also true that such people can also be *living at the same time* as those who do not share those same characteristics at all and from whom they are distinguished. Thus, contemporaneity is not excluded by Lenski's argument.
2. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 869) astutely defends the need for a solemn declaration from Jesus that the Jewish race would continue on earth until the Lord comes. In fact, this people might be supposed to deserve extermination since it turned down and murdered its own Christ, despite its particular privileges. Contrary to all historical probability, the Jews would remain a distinct people. However, the context speaks of SIGNS which would point unmistakably to the near approach of a great event, SIGNS as easily recognizable as the greening of the trees that indicate spring's arrival, SIGNS that would not appear until the appointed time. *The very continuance of the Jewish race down to the Judgment could never be a sign of its approach, because this supposed sign loses its value as a particular indication at the appropriate time, being the common experience of EVERY AGE!*
3. Granted for sake of argument that *genea* could mean both "generation" and "race," thus permitting the prophecy to have a potentially double fulfillment, first that the Jewish race would not pass away until the destruction of Jerusalem, and, second, that the Hebrews would not disappear from the earth until Judgment, on what basis could it be proven that Jesus intended

BOTH MEANINGS AT ONCE IN THE SAME SENTENCE? But that the latter meaning is not in Jesus' mind is indicated by the fact that the Apostles listening to Him would "see all these things" which must take place before that generation would pass away (24:33).

4. Study other texts where *generation* (*geneà*) is used in its usual literal sense: 1:17; Luke 1:48, 50; Acts 13:36; 14:16; 15:21; Eph. 3:5, 21; Col. 1:26; Heb. 3:10 (= Ps. 95:7ff.). While Luke 16:8 certainly linked *geneà* with both the sons of this age and the sons of light, it correctly places them in the same generation, not scattered over many centuries. While Acts 2:40 and Phil. 2:15 speak of a type of people, yet nothing contextually prohibits their being contemporaries of the very people who are exhorted to distinguish themselves from such a crooked, depraved generation.

## CONCLUSION

This verse, then, is truly what Kik (*Matthew XXIV*) styled it, "the pivotal time text." It reveals Jesus' true prophetic perspective in that it furnishes the first, clearest SIGN of the time limitation within all the aforementioned events were to occur. Because in the first section (24:4-14) Jesus denied that world-shaking tragedies were a sign of the end, He cannot now be stirring together events connected with both Jerusalem's destruction and the world's end. Because in the second section (24:15-28) He prospected events geographically slated for Palestine and ethnically restricted to the Jewish people, these are not to be mistaken for the world's end either. Because in the third section (24:29-31) He adopted apocalyptic language to envision the immediate theological results of His victory and vindication, it is unnecessary that any of its images refer to Judgment Day either. So, when Jesus formed the time-frame that confined His prophetic perspective to the era of His own contemporaries, that settles the question as to His subject. Up to this verse He predicted God's sentence only upon the unbelieving of Judaism. From this point on He will proceed to describe a universal judgment that involves not one but all nations.

### 4. The certainty of the predicted events (24:35)

**24:35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.** In this context there are two things that *will not pass away*:

“this generation” (24:34) and the words of Jesus and durability of His words is more lasting than the universe itself! Earlier (5:18), Jesus had affirmed the permanent validity of the Mosaic Law until its complete fulfillment. Now He places His own word on that same level! How dare this thirty-year-old Galilean invite comparison between His own words with the apparently permanent forces of the universe? Yet, if *heaven and earth* are upheld by the word of God and by that same means *shall pass away* (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3, 10ff.; II Peter 3:5-7, 10-13), this bold assertion of Jesus demands that we admit that His own statements possess all the omnipotence and eternity of God. Because this declaration concludes Jesus’ prophecy, it constitutes His personal signature to the certainty of its fulfillment. For His words to *pass away*, the prophetic predictions filling this chapter must fail to be fulfilled as foretold.

While we are right to recognize that *my words* mean anything Jesus says, here He points specifically to everything He had just predicted. The Jerusalem Temple, that sun around which Judaism’s solar system revolved, had seemed to Jesus’ followers as durable as heaven and earth, and so much an integral part of God’s program that it could never perish. Now they must learn that only what Jesus says is truly imperishable and more dependable than any spiritual or material universe they had known before (See notes on 24:29.)

His claim, *My words shall not pass away*, is the more striking in light of His subsequent confession not to know the date of His Second Coming (24:36). However, Jesus’ well-established foreknowledge of the Jewish wars and Jerusalem’s fall have established beyond all doubt His claim to be God’s Son and to know what He is talking about when He reveals what He DOES know. (See on 24:36.) He knows about the future Judgment too. Let all who hear Christ’s sure word take it into account in shaping their lives!

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What, according to Jesus, is the point of the comparison in the fig tree parable?
2. What information does Luke alone furnish that assists our interpretation of the fig tree story?
3. What is the thing which Jesus compares the appearance of leaves on the trees? How do you know?
4. What does the expression “at the very gates (or: doors)” mean?

5. What are some of the Biblical definitions of the word "generation" as these may be ascertained from the uses the Bible makes of the word?
6. Which of these definitions is appropriate here in 24:32-35? How do you know?
7. What does Jesus include in the expression: "all these things" in the sentence, "This generation shall not pass away, till *all these things* be accomplished"? Defend your answer, explaining how you decide this.
8. Jesus, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Explain how the first expression serves to clarify the second. In what sense shall heaven and earth pass away: literally? figuratively? Or is this only a relative comparison? In what sense will Jesus' word not pass away?
9. Luke quotes Jesus as affirming that "the Kingdom of God" is what is approaching. To what phase of God's rule does Jesus allude, if all of the foregoing detailed prophecies are to be considered harbingers of it?

### III. CHRIST'S SECOND COMING (24:36—25:46)

#### A. The Date Known but to God (24:36)

(Parallel: Mark 13:32)

36 But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only.

#### B. Stories Illustrating Important Characteristics of the Final End-Times

##### 1. Illustration From Life Before the Flood (24:37-42)

(Parallel: Mark 13:33; Luke 21:34-36)

37 And as *were* the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man. 38 For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, 39 and they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of man. 40 Then shall two men be in the field; one is taken and one is left: 41 two women *shall be* grinding at

the mill; one is taken and one is left. 42 Watch therefore; for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Jesus seems to believe in angels. Do you? What does their existence mean to you?
- b. Do you think it is safe for the Son of God, the revealer of truth and the way back to God, to admit that He does not know the time of His return? Does not this admission compromise our total confidence in His other revelations? In what sense can He affirm His ignorance on this point without compromising His authority?
- c. Do you see anything significant about the order of Jesus' words: "no one (man) . . . the angels . . . the Son . . . the Father"? If so, what is the significance?
- d. Some think that Jesus has now changed the subject from events connected with His own generation to the Second Coming. Others believe He changed the subject back in verse 29. Which of these two views is more nearly correct? On what basis do you decide as you do?
- e. Some notice that Jesus denied that any human being knows *the day and hour* of His coming, but said nothing about their knowing the year, month or week. Accordingly, say they, we may discover these latter with reasonable certainty. Do Jesus' words refer to the exact *day and hour* in the sense of the hour or minute? Or is His meaning more general? What other texts or information would clarify His intended meaning?
- f. Why is the time of Jesus' return known only to God? Of what advantage to us is this?
- g. How does the fact that Matthew and Mark cited Jesus' ignorance of the final date actually comfort us by assuring us that all else they relate about Jesus is true?
- h. How does Jesus' admission of ignorance about the date of His return actually build and confirm our faith in Him rather than weaken or destroy it?
- i. Some consider the story of Noah and the flood to be a fable grossly exaggerated and not to be taken seriously as sober history. On the basis of His reference to Noah and company, do you think Jesus agrees that Noah's flood is purely legendary? How certain

do you think Jesus was that the information in Genesis 6-9 really occurred as written? What does this say about Genesis as a book? about Noah? about the flood? about Jesus? about you?

- j. Do you see anything wrong with what people were doing in Noah's day? After all, they were eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage. Do not these activities characterize our normal everyday life? What could be so wrong about this? Further, Jesus' application pictures people at work in the field or at the mill. Surely this is not wrong too? How could these ordinary activities have anything to do with man's unpreparedness for (1) Noah's flood or (2) Christ's Second Coming?
- k. What is the psychological problem of people who try desperately to learn the date of Christ's return? How, according to the Scriptures, can such people be helped?
- l. What should we think of people who, by explanations of prophecy or other methods, try to discover what even God's Son did not know? What should we think about their explanations?
- m. Jesus said, "Watch therefore, for you know not. . . ." In what way(s) should our daily activities be permeated with a sense of watchfulness? How should we organize our daily affairs, so as to be able to do this? By neither eating nor drinking, marrying nor being given in marriage? Should we not work in the field or grind at the mill?
- n. What major Bible doctrine is reaffirmed by the expression: "one is taken and one is left"?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"However, as to the precise date or when that hour will strike, NOBODY knows, not even the heavenly messengers nor the Son. Only the Father knows. In fact, the second coming of the Messiah will be just like it was in Noah's time. In those days just before the flood they went right on eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, right up to the very day when Noah entered the ark. Those people were unaware of the impending danger until the flood actually came and swept them all away. This is the way the Messiah's coming will take place. At that time two men will be working together in the field. One will be swept away and one will remain. Two women will be grinding at a handmill. One will be swept away and the other will remain.

“But be on your guard, lest your minds be coarsened by self-indulgent carousing and drunkenness and by the worries of this life, so that that Day suddenly overtake you. It will go off like a trap, catching all the inhabitants of the entire earth. Be constantly on the alert and pray, since you have no idea when your Lord is coming. Pray that you may have the ability to survive all these things that are about to take place, and to stand with confidence in the presence of Christ Himself!”

### SUMMARY

The time of Christ's Second Coming is known only to the Father. Life on earth at that time will continue right up to the last minute as if nothing were going to happen. This very ordinariness and normalcy could lull the believer into complacency. Therefore, to avoid this trap, prayer is required for strength to survive and to stand victoriously before the tribunal of Christ Himself!

### NOTES

#### A. The Date Known but to God (24:36)

24:36 **But of that day and hour.** Kik (*Matthew XXIV*) correctly entitled this verse “the transition text,” because Jesus has abruptly but clearly changed the subject, a fact made evident in various ways:

1. Note the triumphant finality with which verse 35 closes the predictions concerning the fall of the Jewish state in the lifetime of Jesus' generation.
2. Jesus then introduces the following material with *but (de)*. Granted, this is not a strong adversative conjunction in Greek, but it implies some kind of contrast between the foregoing material and what comes next.
3. The subject introduced next is *that day* (singular), whereas in the foregoing section (24:4-35) He treated “those days” (plural). (24:19, 22 = Mark 13:17, 19 = Luke 21:23) In 24:36 Jesus speaks of a specific *day and hour*. This distinction between singular, *day*, and plural, “days,” is neither accidental nor insignificant. Kik (*Matthew XXIV*, 102) observed:

Nowhere in the New Testament is the plural—*the days, days of vengeance, those days*—used in reference to the second.

coming of Christ or to the final judgment. . . . A general impression prevails that the term, "last days," has reference to a short period just before the second coming of Christ, but that term is not so defined in Scriptures. The "last days" began with the first advent of Christ and will continue until his second advent. This is indicated in a number of scriptural passages (Heb. 1:1f.; Acts 2:16f.; I John 2:18; I Peter 1:20). . . . The plural does not refer either to the second coming or the final judgment.

*That day* is decidedly unique, since there could not be many, truly final "last Days," but only one definitive Last Day. In this light, then, *that day and hour* became a practically fixed, well-defined technical term reinforced by Jesus' further instruction. (Cf. 24:42, 44, 50; 25:13; Mark 13:32f.; Luke 21:34.) Earlier, our Lord spoke of the Judgment as *that day* (7:22) and revealed much about *the day* of Judgment (11:22, 24; 12:36). This usage is reflected in the Apostles' language. (Cf. I Thess. 5:2, 4; II Thess. 1:10; II Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8; I Cor. 3:13; Jude 6, etc.)

4. This verse unequivocally changes the subject from Jerusalem's last days to the Final Day of the world. When Jesus affirmed that *no one knows that day and hour*, He clearly distinguished this particular Day from ALL the days for which He had earlier furnished some clear, definite signs of their near approach. Contrarily, concerning this one Day He denies that anyone can discern the time of its arrival, because there shall be no forewarning evidence given. For this latter Day only constant readiness would suffice due to its absolutely unknowable arrival date (24:42—25:46). The approximate time of Jerusalem's fall could be estimated with reasonable accuracy, but the moment of the world's Last Day remains a state secret of the Almighty.

**But of that day and hour knoweth no one.** Some argue that Jesus did not deny we can calculate the month, year or century, since He only indicated as secret *the day and hour*. Nevertheless, that He intends to declare absolutely unknown and unknowable the general period of His return is explicitly declared by Mark (13:33): "Watch and pray, for you do not know when THE TIME will come." Further, *hour* need not mean "the specific schedule," but "time" generally. (Cf. John 2:4; 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 16:2; 17:1.) In this sense, *day and hour* are but two ways of referring to the same

time period in question, technically a hendiadys. Either way, as Bruce (*Training*, 328) noted,

This statement, that the time of the end is known alone to God, excludes the idea that it can be calculated, or that data are given in Scripture for that purpose. If such data be given, then the secret is virtually disclosed. We therefore regard the calculations of students of prophecy respecting the times and seasons as random guesses unworthy of serious attention.

If the Son of God Himself does not know, how could any dumb disciple expect to guess it right?! This inescapably real human ignorance will be underlined no less than six times in His message (24:42, 44, 50; 25:13; Mark 13:33, 35; Luke 21:34).

*Not even the angels of heaven.* Study Jesus' doctrine of *angels* in Matthew (13:39-42, 49f.; 16:27; 18:10; 22:30; 25:31, 41; 26:53). *Angels* are possibly inserted here because, despite their specially privileged relationship and access to God (18:10) and despite their own participation in particular phases of the world's Last Day (13:41; cf. Rev. 14:19), they have not been informed of God's eschatological timetable. This automatically disarms in advance any false prophet who tries to claim inside information on this critical date on the basis of claimed angelic revelations.

*Neither the Son.* Before puzzling over Jesus' admission to ignorance, we must note in what order He named each protagonist:

1. Created beings: man (*no one, oudeis*, masculine) and *the angels of heaven*.
2. Uncreated Beings: *the Son* and *the Father*.

Further, starting with man, He traced an ascending scale from the purely human to the purely Divine, inserting between them, first, created spirits, *the angels*, then the uncreated *Son*, the eternal Word made flesh. Jesus expresses His true identity openly. He is simply not an ignorant human like anyone else, because He writes His own name with the heavenly beings, between God and the angels. Mackenzie (*P.H.C.*, XXIII,478) stated the appropriateness of this order beautifully:

Let the name of any of the prophets or apostles be substituted for the designation of Christ, and a sentence is produced at which even a Socinian (anti-trinitarian denier of Christ's divinity, HEF) might stagger. "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, *neither Moses*, but the Father."

It matters little what particular name is selected for the experiment. Isaiah, Daniel, Paul or John, in such a collocation, would be alike incongruous with the whole phraseology and spirit of the Bible. Why, then, would such an announcement have revolted us, when the name of the Son, in this identical connexion, awakens no surprise? Manifestly because the human soul of Christ, from its conjunction with "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person," was admitted to a knowledge of the counsel of God which is never ascribed to any other creature; manifestly because "in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

Neither Matthew nor Mark hesitate to report this confessed ignorance of His return date. Were they attempting to foist off on the world a false Messiah, they could not have afforded to risk inclusion of such an embarrassing admission. But the marvel is that our Evangelists think they run no risk to report this astonishing admission. Why? Because they are absolutely certain that nothing is so convincing as truth and they tell this about Jesus, perfectly confident that this confession of ignorance really detracts nothing from His glory.

Our faith in Jesus Himself is not undermined by His frank confession of limitations. Rather, does not Jesus' rigorous honesty actually undergird our confidence in Him? We would have had far less faith in Him, had He faked an answer to this crucial question. Nevertheless, He had the moral courage to risk the loss of every disciple by stating, "I do not know." Further, He said it in the face of all the withering criticism of future generations of scoffers whether erudite or not. But, all risks notwithstanding, we may stand with Him who could unflinchingly tell us the truth, however apparently embarrassing it be to His position, however gratifying to His critics and however astonishing to His followers. This unswerving honesty marks Him a true ambassador and credible spokesman for God. (Cf. John 7:18.)

Why did not Jesus know this date? Following Biederwolf (348), we may summarize three attempts to resolve this quandary thus:

1. This ignorance is referred to Christ's human nature and is consistent with the statement that He emptied Himself (Phil. 2:5ff.) and increased in wisdom (Luke 2:52) and learned obedience (Heb. 5:8f.). The unique combination of complete humanness and true deity in one Person remains beyond our human comprehension,

but not beyond our belief, given the sufficiency of the evidence. If He, as man, did not know this date, so what? This is a characteristic of man.

2. "He knew personally, but not officially, i.e. Christ was using hyperbolic language to show that the great event was to be kept a profound secret, the knowledge not having been given Him *as regards us*, i.e. for the purpose of being communicated to us. . . . But this seems something of an attempt to evade the plain meaning of the expression, the ignorance referred to being the same as that of man and angels with which it is connected." Further, had Jesus known the date, but refused to reveal it, we would be irresistibly tempted to dissect His words for some hint hidden there. Contrarily, what He does imply about His return date is that its delay would be so indefinite and the interval preceding it so impossible to calculate that numerous disciples would surrender their alertness, cease their preparations and return to sinfulness and debunk the doctrine as mere hero legend.
3. Schaff, who does not like this dualistic separation between Christ's two natures, suggests a voluntary self-limitation of knowledge on the part of Christ, i.e. a sacred unwillingness to know. He who could have requested twelve legions of angels, but opted to undergo the shame and submitted to separation from the Father, could He not also surrender to the indignity of now knowing this date? Even if this perfect Judge alone knows the Father and what was in man, might He not for our sakes decide not to be above mankind by knowing that day and hour?

Whichever view is taken, a clear distinction must be made between His ignorance of this one item and the possibility of error when, as a true prophet, He revealed the mind of God. For, had He been only a man, He would have rendered Himself ridiculous in the extreme to entitle Himself "*the Son*," placing Himself alongside *the Father* and superior to angels. Further, were He but a common, ignorant mortal, to describe Himself as "the Son of man," a title true in that sense of anyone else, becomes no title at all. But because He was the GOD-MAN, His appropriation of the title, "Son of man," becomes a highly relevant revelation of His true nature. To the question whether His knowledge were limited in other ways, we may respond that this is the only recorded subject on which He had to answer, "I do not know."

So, why is the time not known to *the Son, but to the Father only*? Earlier, Jesus had taught that the Father has sovereign right to establish certain priorities (20:23; cf. Deut. 29:29; Acts 1:7). The motive for God's secreting this information may not lie in some weakness of Jesus' nature, but in the nature of OUR weakness. Every human being must live with the uncertainty of the date of judgment. Consequently, when we realize that any day could be our last, to please God, we orient all our priorities in view of His judgment (II Cor. 5:9f.; II Peter 3:8-13). This aims to motivate each generation to live in a state of expectancy that God's Judgment Day could arrive in its own lifetime, and so make the required preparation. So, it may be that Jesus, the Son of man, chose to live as any other human being, motivated by this same uncertainty. Hence, His thorough-going identification with us, His brethren, cost Him this knowledge.

Two implications are evident in the fact that only the Father knows the date:

1. If Jesus does not know the date of His return, then nothing revealed in this entire discourse may be interpreted as offering certain signs of that event, because this would imply that He DID know.
2. Everything else Jesus will say next grows out of this complete human ignorance of the world's Last Day and urges practical preparation for it in light of this limitation. To suppose that clever calculations of the signs on our part could discover that date is to eviscerate the following lessons on all meaning. (See notes on 24:42, 44, 50; 25:13; cf. Luke 21:34f.; Mark 13:35.)

Plummer (*Matthew*, 340) sees the following illustrations as Jesus' treatment of mankind's having to live with the tension between the certainty of judgment and the uncertainty of the date on which all must face that judgment. He asks, "What effect will this combination of certainty and uncertainty have upon mankind?" Jesus answers by indicating what effect this tension SHOULD have on each disciple. Analyze how each story illustrates this.

## B. Stories Illustrating Important Features of the Final End-Times

1. Illustration From Life Before the Flood:  
"Business As Usual" (24:37-42)

**24:37** And as were the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man. "That day and hour" (v. 36) are now identified as the

long-awaited *coming of the Son of man (parousia)*. By using this technical term for His Second Coming, He does not mean a spiritual, invisible coming in temporal providential blessing or judgment, but that great final event alone (24:27). This illustration was used more than once (cf. Luke 17:26f.). *The days of Noah* are described in Gen. 6-9; Heb. 11:7; I Peter 3:20; II Peter 2:5. Jesus stated His conclusion first, filling in details next.

As . . . so. The situation before the flood serves as a basis for Jesus' comparison, but does He thereby intend to validate the historicity of the Noachic epoch? How could a dubious fable wield the convincing power to drive men to act, if it is objectively untrue? Obvious fictions do not transform character. So, it is psychologically improbable that our Lord would resort to religious fiction to support the comparison He drew. Consider the illogic of those who would demythologize Genesis: "Christ's return will be like the days of Noah. But the days of Noah never were. So, Christ's return is founded on a literary allusion of dubious worth, but still teaches the moral lesson." No pious fraud has the fearful power to move the conscience and will like the true execution of divine justice on guilty mankind. Jesus assumed His comparison is grounded in facts that actually occurred.

**24:38 For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark.** Jesus does not point to any gross iniquity in Noah's contemporaries, since the activities to which they are here pictured as giving themselves, are neutral per se. Similarly, in Lot's day, people were buying and selling, planting and building (Luke 17:28). Rather, their grave miscalculation arose from their careless indifference to God's solemn calls to repentance. They conducted their daily routine as if no judgment would strike, as if there would always be a tomorrow just like today in which to dash off a quick prayer of contrition and rush for the ark, should that unlikely event ever really become necessary. They married and settled down comfortably in the common activities of life and turned off Noah's preaching as alarmist extremism. It would be mistaken to suppose that the great tribulation of Revelation 7:14 could not be in full swing before Jesus comes, merely because He describes the world as engaged in its ordinary pursuits, because these relatively untroubled people may not be identified with those who undergo the Christian tribulation referred to. In fact, these happy-go-lucky folk conducting their normal life may actually be contributing to the tribulation of the godly.

24:39 **And they knew not.** WHAT did they not know? Had not Noah preached righteousness and judgment to come (Heb. 11:7; II Peter 2:5)? Did they not know that God meant business when He threatened them with annihilation? *They knew not* that they could not get away with their godless lives until God brought them irrefutable evidence that He meant what He said, that Noah was His servant, that "the soul that sins shall die," and that there are no exceptions. Although they had indeed been informed, they did not fully perceive the danger they were in until disaster struck.

WHY *did they not know*? Because they did not want to. The demands of God and of conscience were, then as today, postponed or relegated to the realm of the irrelevant, "explained away 'naturally,' 'reasonably,' even 'scientifically,' until the fatal day arrives" (Lenski, *Matthew*, 956). Gross immorality is not the big problem because of the magnitude of God's forgiving grace. The real issue is this willful, therefore culpable, indifference to warnings, this gross ignorance caused by turning their mind off to God.

Many hold that the great astronomical cataclisms and signs in the sky (24:29-31; Luke 21:11, 25f.) are literal warnings that sound the alarm of the world's end. Were that true, on what basis could Jesus affirm here that the world shall continue to operate on a "business-as-usual" basis right up to moment of His return, blithely unaware that its eternal destiny is about to break in upon them? How could the world of tomorrow be taken by surprise as was Noah's world if there were spatial fireworks warning men to get right with God? The fact is that *they knew not* because there were no suns refusing to shine, no moons not giving their light, no stars falling from heaven to alarm them. Consequently, because no such astronomical credentials of God's impending judgment scared those of Noah's day into making a last-minute frantic dash for the ark, we are not at liberty to interpret 24:29-31 as if it meant that the Day of Jesus' Return shall be preceded by literal, heavenly clues that permit men to foresee its dawning. The absolute security of Noah's generation, which serves as the basis of Jesus' comparison totally excludes the appearance of millennial harbingers when He returns. Contrary to Alford (I, 246), the security here spoken of is totally inconsistent with the anguish and fear prophesied in Luke 21:25f., because two different events are described: there, the end of the Jewish era in God's economy; here, the end of the world.

**Until the flood came and took them all away.** Jesus' second point of comparison concerns the abruptness, finality and inescapability with which judgment comes to an unexpecting, unprepared world.

24:40, 41

24:40 Then shall two men be in the field; one is taken, and one is left. 41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. These two vignettes carry forward Jesus' earlier point: life will proceed as usual right down to the last second before the Second Coming. Simply because the schedule of Jesus' return cannot be known, His saints will not be climbing some mountain peak or crowding into church buildings to await His arrival. Rather, like anyone else, they will be involved in typical daily occupations, such as field-work done by men or food preparation by women. (Cf. Exod. 11:5.) To grind grain into flour for bread, these *two women are* seated on the floor. Between them are the two grind-stones that constitute *the mill*, one stone mounted atop the other. Depending on the weight of the upper mill-stone, the strength of both women would be needed to turn it. Seated opposite each other, one turns the upper mill-stone a half turn; the other, the remaining half turn, while grain is dropped through a hole in the center of the upper stone.

But Jesus' point is not simply to repeat the lesson of ordinary human activity, as in Noah's day, but also to focus on the rigorous individuality of the final separation: *one is taken and one is left*. Christ's return to judge the world will produce a complete, permanent separation between people who, in other exterior respects, are alike and are even toiling side by side at the same occupations. (See on 13:24-30, 37-43.) The critical factor is each individual's preparation to meet God. However physically near two people may be while working at a common task, they may be worlds apart on the question of Jesus Christ and their love for God's Kingdom.

Who is to be *taken* and who *left*? Some hold that this language teaches that believers are to be taken away from the earth prior to the consummation of all things specifically before a great period of tribulation which, say they, shall be brought on the wicked. Our verses are cited to establish this massive secret rapture. Others hold that this mysterious exodus of the believers is scheduled during, or even after, the great tribulation, but not necessarily in conjunction with Jesus' return. Still others see those *taken* as "received up in glory" by the returning Christ, by supposed cross-reference to 24:31 thought to harmonize with I Thessalonians 4:16f.

Contextually, however, Jesus' total illustration focuses on a different perspective. He now enters into the particulars to explain how people will be *taken away*, not merely en masse, as by a flood, but

individually and personally, while each is engaged in life's common occupations, and yet as thoroughly separated as Noah was from his contemporaries. But who was actually *taken*: Noah or his wicked contemporaries? In his day it was THE UNGODLY, because "the flood came and *took them all away*; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." The wicked are the intruders who have invaded and polluted a world that belongs to God and His people. So, for the happiness and tranquility of the righteous, the ungodly must be removed. This is in "the style of God" to remove the unrighteous by His punitive justice and leave His people in possession of the earth as their inheritance (Ps. 1; 37:9-15, 21f., 27-29, 34; Matt. 5:5; cf. Rom. 4:13).

The ancient world was *taken away*, but Noah was *left*. At the Red Sea the Egyptians were *taken away*, but Israel was *left* alive and free. Sodom and Gomorrah were *taken* by fire and brimstone, but Lot was *left* to go away. Daniel's accusers were *taken away* by lions, but Daniel was *left* completely vindicated. The tares will be *taken away* and burned, but the wheat shall be *left* to be gathered into God's granary. The bad fish shall be *taken away*, but the good alone will be *left*. The wicked shall not stand in the judgment, but those who do the will of God will abide forever. (I John 2:17; cf. Zech. 13:8f. in the context of 12:1—14:21.)

So, it is not at all certain that the *taken* are God's raptured saints, gathered more or less secretly out of this present evil age. Rather, both in Matthew and Luke (17:22-37), Jesus pictures sudden destruction that thundered down on complacently wicked people. Far clearer is the supposition that Jesus proposes to take the unprepared by surprise to their destruction and leave the godly in possession of their inheritance. This only apparently conflicts with our being caught up to meet Him in the air (John 14:3; I Thess. 4:13ff.), since the saved expect to inherit a new universe in which righteousness feels at home (II Peter 3:13; Isa. 65:17; 66:22). So, Jesus' prophecy teaches simply that, after the dust settles, the only ones left standing victorious in possession of the land will be the Christians! (See on 5:5.) In fact, sudden angelic harvesting will first gather the wicked from among the righteous (Matt. 13:41ff., 49f. interprets 13:30: "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.") Once the weeds are harvested, all that remains is the Owner's good

grain, i.e. the righteous, God's people. Are the following texts appropos? Ps. 37:9-11; 55:22f.; 58:9-11; 64:1-10; Isa. 26:20f.; Rev. 3:9f.; 18:4; 19:1-9.

24:42 **Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh.** This, Jesus thinks, is the appropriate conclusion to His first illustration. So saying, He settled three points:

1. **THE CERTAINTY OF THE DAY:** *Your Lord is coming.*
  - a. He who comes is *your Lord*, "so glorious, powerful and clothed with authority and majesty is he; also, and who are loyal to him. Cf. Isa. 57:15" (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 871).
  - b. *Your Lord is coming:* His return is certain. The sufferings of human existence are not eternal, because human history itself is not endless. Rather, the date for the final vanquishing of evil is now in the hands of Christ Jesus, the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. Our certainty of His reign does not rest in knowing the date of His coming, but in our confidence in His Lordship, in the complete sovereignty of His reign and in the absolute certainty of His coming to draw history to a decisive close.
2. **THE CONCEALMENT OF THE DELAY:** *You know not on what day.* No time has been revealed, so signs given to enable anyone to forecast the dawning of the final Day of the Lord (I Thess. 5:1ff.). No sectarian time-setting or sign-watching could be more perverse or futile, since it arises out of curiosity to know what Jesus says cannot be known and ignores this unequivocal declaration of the Lord Himself that the time or season cannot be computed (cf. Mark 13:33). Jesus next reinforced this point with three illustrations that undergird this basic truth.
3. **THE CONSEQUENT DUTY:** *Watch therefore.* In the tension resulting from the certainty of Jesus' return and from the lack of any clue to the date, the correct Christian attitude is that mental and moral alertness that is ever the price of freedom and one of the sources of our true happiness (Rev. 16:15). In Greek, *watch (grēgoreíte)* does not involve simply looking at something so much as being awake and alert intellectually and spiritually, as illustrated in Jesus' stories that follow. Although everyone in these parables had his own specific duties, this constant sense of expectancy is to be their common responsibility and the spirit in which each is to work. For the Church to abstain from daily work and normal human activities in order to search the skies ("watching") for the first inkling of His return, would be to misinterpret His meaning entirely.

What, then, is the mainspring that activates the watching spirit?

1. Contextually, it is primarily the absolute impossibility to ascertain the time of Jesus' return.
2. Is it not more especially a loving eagerness to please Him who has entrusted such gifts to us, a warm affection for our returning Lord that invigorates our sense of responsibility and stimulates us to diligent, almost inspired, activity?
3. Is it not also an alert, hopeful anticipation of His pleasure upon returning to find our work in progress, and a longing for His warm, hearty praise?

So, watchfulness has its alert eye on the Lord's purposes, program and methods. Jesus' antithesis to watchfulness is reported by Luke 21:34-36): "Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare." It is not merely the gluttons and drunkards who are suddenly trapped, but also those everyday worriers whose concern for food, raiment and creature comforts takes their attention from the unseen spiritual concerns of man's true destiny and from the one object of man's existence, judgment before the returned Christ. This distraction permits the great judgment morning to dawn as unwelcome and unprepared for as a surprise attack. When terrified sinners are horrified by their unpreparedness in the presence of the overpowering majesty of the returned Christ, His prepared people confidently stand on their feet cheering in the presence of their Savior, Lord and King. (Consider Ps. 1:5; Mal. 3:2; Isa. 33:13-16; Phil. 2:10; I Cor. 16:22; Jude 24!)

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. On what basis may it be affirmed that the expression "that day and hour" refers to the Second Coming and the end of the world? Had Jesus been discussing this in the immediate context?
2. On what other occasion(s) did Jesus affirm that only the Father decides the sequence of events in human history and established His own priorities?
3. Where had Jesus used the illustration of Noah and the flood earlier? (book and chapter) What was He illustrating in that context?
4. State the main point of the illustration taken from the days of Noah.
5. What Greek technical word did Jesus use to indicate that He refers

- only to His Second Coming, not to a spiritual, invisible coming either in temporal judgment on His enemies nor in temporal blessing on His people?
6. List the various activities of everyday life going on in Noah's day and at Jesus' return.
  7. What is meant by the phrase: "one is taken and one is left"? *Taken* where? *Left* where?
  8. What touch of realism is pictured in the fact that "two women shall be grinding at the mill"? What kind of a mill is involved?

## 2. Illustration of the Burglar (24:43f.)

43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. 44 Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How does this story differ in emphasis from the previous one?
- b. Why do you think Jesus told several different stories centering around His principle topic? What effect would such repetition produce on the reader or hearer?
- c. Do you think it is wise for Jesus to compare Himself to a burglar?
- d. What is this "hour that you think not"? Is it an hour when you think Jesus will not come?
- e. If the New Testament instructs us to expect Jesus' return at any moment and to prepare adequately for it, how can Jesus affirm that He will return when we do not expect Him? That is, how can we expect Him and not expect Him at the same time?
- f. Despite the uncertainty about God's scheduling of the Second Coming, what grand truth is not at all uncertain, according to Jesus?
- g. If you are so sure about Jesus' return, did you actually look up this morning and pray, "Lord, will this be the day?" How would a prayer in this spirit help you to be ready?

## PARAPHRASE

"You can be sure that if the head of the house had known in what part of the night the burglar was coming, he would have kept awake

and not allowed his house to be broken into. So, you too must be ready, because the Messiah's second coming will take place at a time when you do not expect Him."

## SUMMARY

Although Christ's return will occur at some unknowable moment, you can know to be prepared.

## NOTES

2. Illustration of the Burglar:  
"The Time is Unpredictable, So  
Be Always Ready."

24:43 **But know this:** the following all-too-common experience is your fair warning that your situation parallels that of someone personally responsible for protecting his house and its contents against theft (Luke 12:39f.). *If the master of the house had known . . . he would not have suffered.* This is a hypothesis contrary to fact, because he could not have known the exact time of the thief's coming, because thieves give no advance warning to their victims. Worse, the owner could not even know for certain whether the thief were even coming, much less *in what watch*. *Watch* refers to the division of the night into guard-duty of 3-4 hours for each *watch* which is marked by a change of the guard. (Note on 14:25; cf. Judg. 7:19; I Sam. 11:11; Lam. 2:19; Luke 12:38.) For people living in houses constructed even out of stone, to have their walls *broken through* is a grimly real possibility. (Cf. 6:19, "thieves dig through and steal." The householder's only hope lay in constant vigilance.)

24:44 **Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh.** So Jesus compared Himself to a thief only in one point: the absolutely unknowable time of His coming. Elsewhere this same "thief in the night" motif is caught up and developed as psychological motivation for repentance and service (I Thess. 5:2ff.; II Peter 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). *Be ye also ready.* It is everywhere assumed that the Christian need not be caught unawares, because, while many certainties surround the Second Coming, one thing is totally certain: *the Son of man is coming!* No uncertainty about the schedule or manner of His return can justify any relaxing

of our readiness. *Be ready*: no cost or effort must be thought too great to be adequately prepared. This readiness involves alertness and sobriety (Rom. 13:11-14). Physical rest in sleep is not condemned. Rather, He rejects that moral indifference to God that shows itself in a lack of concern to ready oneself appropriately for the Final Day (22:11ff.).

**For in an hour that ye think not, the Son of man cometh.** Now the disciples are compared to the master of the house in two ways: (1) there would be no forewarning of the coming; and (2) they would need constant vigilance. This truth has several ramifications:

1. The Lord will send no special "last days" signs to warn Christians in that last fateful generation of His near approach. This parable stands in direct contrast to the lesson of the fig tree (24:32f.). The fig tree furnishes clear indication of the arrival of summer, whereas the burglar gives absolutely no advance notice of his arrival. Therefore, the events indicated by the story of the thief in the night cannot be identified with those forepictured by the parable of the fig tree. The fig tree speaks of the death-throes of Israel's institutions, whereas the thief in the night speaks only of Christ's Second Coming.
2. This inability to know harmonizes with the character of our dispensation. Our era is one of walking by faith, not by sight or full information on every event in God's timing (II Cor. 4:18; 5:7). The very nature of the Christian epoch would be drastically warped, were it possible for us to ascertain our future infallibly. We could delay our obedience and dally until shortly before the fated hour and finally repent at leisure after a life of self-indulgence. As it is, however, the very uncertainty of every moment of our lives argues convincingly for godliness in every minute, for it could be our last.
3. God is running this program! There is no room for presumption on our part. Whether we die and go to be with the Lord, or whether He returns first, the result is the same: prepared or not, we must appear before Him who is our Judge. Every day of opportunity is His gracious gift to welcome and to live joyously, thankfully and responsibly. What our Lord intends to do at any future point, He can well set in motion today. Therefore, every second is potentially history's last.
4. Lenski (*Matthew*, 957) exclaimed, "That is the astonishing feature about the uncertainty regarding the time. Even those who are

constantly on the watch will be completely surprised." Note: not unprepared; just surprised by its sudden arrival.

At the same time, the unexpected coming of the thief must not be misunderstood to mean "stealth" or "impossibility of discovery," as if Jesus were teaching a "secret rapture." Rather, Peter underlines the great noise involved in Jesus' coming "as a thief" (II Peter 3:10). The greater marvel would be if nobody noticed His arrival, despite the earth-shaking calamities he described (II Peter 3:4)!

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Define a "watch in the night." To what does it refer in Jesus' story?
2. What is meant by the expression, "broken through," with reference to a house?
3. In what way is Jesus like the thief in the night? How is He different?
4. In what way is the believer like the householder? How is he different?
5. What precautions should the believer make under the circumstances Jesus described?
6. Despite the uncertainties involved, what event is absolutely certain?
7. What is the principal topic of which this parable is illustration?

### LET'S PREVIEW THE FOLLOWING PARABLES

Note how closely each of the following parables shares certain common qualities with the others and develops Jesus' general theme:

1. Each story is addressed to Jesus' disciples, hence does not speak about the world particularly. Rather, each addresses problems that concern Christians intimately, by speaking to the issue of Christian responsibility during the period between Pentecost and the Second Coming.
2. Each parable concerns an important figure who is absent, but returns. The point of each illustration turns on what would transpire upon his return. This aspect emphasizes the responsibility of those who await him during his absence. In its own way each story emphasizes (1) the uncertainty of the time of the Lord's return; (2) the necessity for appropriate preparation for that event during his absence; and (3) the rewards or punishments for success or failure to do this.

- a. The parable of the conscientious and the hypocritical servant sees stewards left in charge of the household of an absent master (24:45-51).
    - (1) THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE TIME: "My master is delayed" (24:48).
    - (2) THE RESPONSIBILITY: "to give them their food at the proper time" (24:45).
    - (3) THE REWARDS: "He will set him over all his possessions" or punish him and put him with the hypocrites (24:47, 51).
  - b. The parable of the ten virgins depicts ten girls awaiting the coming of an absent bridegroom (25:1-13).
    - (1) THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE TIME: "The bridegroom was delayed" (25:5).
    - (2) THE RESPONSIBILITY: "Go rather to the dealers and buy (oil) for yourselves" (25:9).
    - (3) THE REWARDS: "Those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast"; others remained excluded outside (25:10-12).
  - c. The parable of the talents pictures three servants who were responsible for their Lord's money during his absence (25:14-30).
    - (1) THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE TIME: "After a long time the master . . . came" (25:9).
    - (2) THE RESPONSIBILITY: "You ought to have invested my money" (25:27).
    - (3) THE REWARDS: "Well done, good and faithful servant" or "Cast out the worthless servant" (25:21, 23, 30).
3. Each parable illustrates some phase of Christian responsibility, but the cumulative instruction of their lessons affords us a grander picture of our service until Jesus comes.
    - a. The parable of the conscientious and the hypocritical stewards teaches loyal concern for everyone else in the Master's household as the prime expression of loyalty to our coming Lord. The emphasis is on our responsibility for OTHERS.
    - b. The ten virgins parable inculcates a conscientiousness that insures our own personal preparation. The emphasis is on our responsibility for SELF-preparation for His coming.
    - c. The talents parable spurs us to make profitable use of everything God has placed at our disposal for His glory. The emphasis is on our responsibility for our Master's BUSINESS to bring Him a profit.

### 3. Illustration of the conscientious and the hypocritical servant (24:45-51)

45 Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath set over his household, to give them their food in due season? 46 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. 47 Verily I say unto you, that he will set him over that he hath. 48 But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord tarrieth; 49 and shall begin to beat his fellow-servants, and shall eat and drink with the drunken; 50 the lord of the servant shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour when he knoweth not, 51 and shall cut him asunder, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How does this illustration differ from the preceding story about the burglar?
- b. In what sense is it true that this parable is really as much about stewardship as it is instruction on what will happen on the Last Day?
- c. In the illustration the conscientious administrator is assigned one kind of work before his master left and another upon his return. How do you explain the difference?
- d. If the Lord Jesus called the administrator "faithful and wise," how can He later term him, "*that evil servant*"? Or, is He talking about the same person? If so, how is this language possible? If not, why say "*that evil servant*"?
- e. On what basis could the evil servant truly say, "My lord tarries"? What would this element of Jesus' story reveal about His Second Coming?
- f. When the lord returned, he found the faithful and wise servant doing what? What does this detail tell us about what we should be doing when Jesus returns?
- g. When the lord returned, what did he find the evil servant doing?
- h. What is the psychological motivation of the evil servant, that caused him to choose the course that he did? Does this ever tempt you?
- i. In what sense is it true that everyone in God's world really has been "set over his household to give them their food at the proper time"?

- j. Explain how a person could be “cut asunder” and yet later be assigned his “portion with the hypocrites.” Would not being chopped in two have ended his miserable existence? How could he feel any further shame by being assigned the hypocrite’s reward? Did he not die, or is this a post-mortem vilification? What do you think happened?
- k. Why bring in “the hypocrites” here, when the story is really about the evil administration of one particular servant? How does this almost passing allusion to the insincere strengthen the impact of Jesus’ story for you?

### PARAPHRASE

“Who then will be the conscientious, sensible slave whom his lord has put in charge over his household to dispense to them their sustenance at the proper time? What happiness will be his when his master comes home and finds him doing what he is supposed to! I can tell you for sure, he will put him in charge of all his property.

“On the other hand, suppose this same servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is taking his time.’ Suppose, too, that he begins to bully his fellow servants, and dines and drinks with his drunken friends. That servant’s master will arrive someday when he least expects him and at an hour that catches him unawares. The lord will cut him in two with a scourge and send him to his fate among those who try to fake it. There people cry and clench their teeth in impotent rage.”

### SUMMARY

Christ’s absence may be prolonged. Nonetheless, the responsibility for others assigned to each of us must be carried out with conscientiousness, because presumption and indifference will be severely punished.

### NOTES

3. Illustration of the conscientious and the hypocritical servant (24:45-51)

24:45 **Who then is the faithful and wise servant?** *Then (àra)* links this parable logically with the foregoing story where Jesus demanded

a state of constant readiness which, in turn, requires a certain type of character: wisdom and loyalty. (Cf. Luke 12:39-42.) The present parable primarily illustrates these qualities and their contrary, the folly of disloyalty. *Who then is?* This question, rather than send us looking for someone else qualified, nudges us to ask it of ourselves.

1. *Faithful (pistòs)* reveals two connected qualities:
  - a. It involves believing that his lord's word is good, his service worthy of one's most earnest, generous service and trusts him to know what is ultimately best for all.
  - b. It is also a trustworthiness and conscientiousness in doing what is expected, fidelity to duty. (Cf. I Cor. 4:1-5; Titus 1:7.)
2. *Wise (frònimos)*, "considerate, thoughtful, prudent, sagacious, sensible").
  - a. The wise servant makes proper use of his stewardship for the profit and benefit of his lord.
  - b. He is also aware that the lord will require an accounting at the proper time.

**Whom his lord hath set over his household, to give them their food in due season.** This description appears to refer only to stewards with responsibility greater than those of the *household* itself. But Jesus obviously intends each disciple to take this warning to heart as if each one is already, or could become, *the faithful and wise servant*. (Cf. Luke 12:41ff.; Mark 13:34-37.) Further, this description of the situation is so psychologically and sociologically true to life, because literally EVERYONE, no matter how humble his station, has really been set *over* others in the wide *household* of humanity. This parable, then, lays stress on proper behavior toward our common fellow-servants in God's household, by depicting this steward's responsibility simply to take care of all the other members of the lord's household during his absence. No concept of our preparation for the Second Coming can be adequate that does not conceive of our duty as one of mutual ministry to our brethren (I Peter 4:10). In the Lord's absence His people cannot serve Him directly. Nevertheless, each proves his sense of responsibility to Jesus by the degree to which he serves the other fellow-servants over whom the Lord has placed him (25:40).

**24:46 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.** Rather than answer His own question, "Who then is the faithful and wise servant?" by saying, "It is the one who . . .,"

Jesus underscores the special happiness of such a person. By so doing, He induces everyone to want to be conscientious and loyal. Happiness, according to Jesus, is to be found, not in fruitless speculation about the signs of the End-time, spending precious time to pin down the date, or in idle sky-gazing to detect some early signal of His return, but in *doing* what the Lord requested. Without anxiety about the date, we simply utilize every day responsibly by working at our appointed task to do honor to our master.

24:47 **Verily I say unto you, that he will set him over all that he hath.** This statement is not to be applied absolutely, as if Jesus would establish only one loyal steward over all His vast Kingdom as his reward for faithful administration, when, as is likely, He actually intends to reward millions of faithful stewards in a similar manner. In fact, what each receives will be far greater than here pictured (25:21, 23; cf. Luke 19:17, 19). Rather, this reward nicely completes Jesus' story, implying a recompense like that of Joseph who, because of his fidelity and wisdom, was elevated from slave to Prime Minister of Egypt (Gen. 39:3ff.; 41:33-44). Christ's rewards are not material, so that to give them to one would impoverish all others, but spiritual, like His own love, so that the more everyone possesses, the more is made available for others! Faithfulness and responsible service will be repaid with opportunities for infinitely greater responsibility. (Cf. Rev. 2:26; 3:21; cf. Matt. 25:21; I Tim. 3:13.) Because this means more work, those self-seeking people who side-step responsibility or loath labor may well ask themselves whether they really long for Christ's rewards after all. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 872) sees implied here

the assignment of certain specific tasks in the life hereafter, each task a matter of pure delight and satisfaction, and each in harmony with the individuality of the person for whom it is marked out.

24:48 **But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord tarrieth. . . .** Who is this fellow? Is he identical with the former wise and faithful steward? Though previously unmentioned, he is the very man. When Jesus told this story earlier, He clearly referred to just one steward; however, He did not term the steward "evil" as here (Luke 12:45). So, Jesus described him here as *evil* by prolepsis, i.e. described him in terms of what his later conduct proved him to have been. However, by this sudden switch, Jesus prospects the two

alternatives open to the SAME servant of God: he may be a wise, faithful steward, or he may elect the route of the self-satisfying, and so prove to be an *evil servant*. Within the same disciple lies this dual potentiality. How does this happen?

*Say in his heart.* Mulling over his changed circumstances brought about by his master's absence, he toys with his options. Outwardly he had welcomed his lord's confidence, apparently vowing loyal, earnest assistance. Inwardly, however, his true desires and secret motives are strikingly diverse. No wonder he will be treated as a hypocrite (24:51).

*My lord tarries.* Although this observation explains his subsequent actions which are condemned, nothing in the text indicates that the observation itself is mistaken. In fact, some lengthy delay explains to a no small degree the false confidence that permitted this steward to get up the courage to act the tyrant and indulge himself excessively. This treacherous manager attempted to pin-point the date of his master's return, but badly miscalculated, because he did not know for HOW LONG his *lord tarries*. To all appearances, the Lord Jesus too is taking His time (*chronizeî*). This harmonizes nicely with similar statements elsewhere (24:4, 19; cf. Luke 12:45). This intimates that Jesus knew that the real date of His Second Coming was scheduled for much later than any suggestion of its nearness might seem to affirm. There is no ground for believing that He expected it in the first century. Peter, too, warned against our growing impatient and slipping into frivolousness and complacent indifference, merely because the years seem to roll uniformly by without any sign of Jesus' coming. Rather, any delay is prompted by His patient mercy and must not be mistaken for ineptness or slowness, because the Day will come suddenly and certainly (II Peter 3:5-12).

**24:49 and shall begin to beat his fellow-servants, and shall eat and drink with the drunken.** Not only are the thoughts of this hypocrite alien to his apparently sincere promises made openly to his departing master, but now his conduct exposes lusts he dared not reveal to his lord's face. *Fellow-servants* emphasizes two things:

1. Although this administrator is in some sense over them, he too is really a *servant* and their *fellow*, hence equally responsible to their common lord to treat them with consideration for sake of the work they rendered the master (cf. I Peter 5:3).
2. If *fellow-servants*, then also the property of his master. Hence, his abusing them constituted an abuse of his lord's possessions,

as truly as if he had been his master's enemy. The crooked steward's bad example and possible misappropriation of what was intended for others, compounded his wickedness, because it hindered them from serving their lord properly.

This supervisor mistook responsibility for the privilege of power, so he exercised the latter and abandoned the former in two ways:

1. *To beat his fellow-servants* is typical of self-assertive people who abuse the trust of power delegated to them, trampling on those under them, but for whose care they are really answerable.
2. *To eat and drink with the drunken* naturally follows for those self-indulgent little bosses who suppose that material enjoyments and bodily pleasures are the natural right of those in power.

Note the fairness with which Jesus, even in passing, treated the use of alcohol among a people accustomed to using fermented wine and strong drink (Deut. 14:26; Isa. 25:6). Although He Himself lived a normal life and ate normal food and drank wine, as opposed to John the Baptist who did neither (Luke 7:33f.), He can still condemn its abuse in no uncertain terms. This, because its abuse leaves men insensitive to their fellows, irresponsible toward their duty, and, consequently, unprepared to meet God. (See "Should Jesus Drink Wine?" my Vol. II, 526ff.)

**24:50** *The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour when he knoweth not.* This is no correction of the servant's conclusion, "My lord tarryes," but, rather, its confirmation, since the delay continued long enough to lull this steward into complete complacency. Carrying on his shameful conduct, he grew confident he would not be surprised. He basked in careless indifference until he no longer worried about his master's return. *He expected not:* his stupidity is the greater because he knew to expect him. Yet his continual self-indulgence further desensitized his moral alertness and proportionately increased his spiritual dullness. *In an hour when he knoweth not:* this emphatically reiterates the fact that absolutely no warning signs will announce the near approach of Jesus' coming. At no time may we safely assume that His Second Coming is not imminent merely because we see no indications warning of His approach. We may not assume that we can stop sinning just in time to be found good and faithful at His return.

24:51 **He shall cut him asunder, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** *To cut asunder (dichotomēō)* is "to cut into two parts." True, horrible butchery was not an unknown punishment in the ancient world. (Cf. Dan. 2:5; 3:29; Heb. 11:37; the apocryphal *Susanna*, vv. 55, 59.) Nevertheless, Jesus' expression may also point elsewhere.

1. Literally, to severe scourging which cuts the skin, or perhaps to mutilation, from which the punished could survive to face the supreme humiliation of being shamed as a hypocrite. (Cf. Sirach 33:26-28; 42:5.) Some societies still mutilate those convicted of certain crimes.
2. Figuratively, to inflict a punishment of extreme severity, his lord not only sliced through the apparent consistency between his pretences and his deeds to unmask his real hypocrisy, but also summarily dismissed him from his position and severed him from his service.

He must be punished *with the hypocrites*, because he was humble and helpful before his master, but turned tyrant when he left. He planned to play the role of conscientious supervisor at his lord's return.

Whether in the parable or in the reality, *the weeping and gnashing of teeth* is the endless punishment of inconsolable grief and helplessness, that self-accusing anger suffered by anyone who sees his true happiness so frivolously and so irretrievably tossed aside by his own foolish choices. (See notes on 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 25:30.)

## LESSONS

The Lord warns that the true criterion is not how people might act, were they certain Christ is coming back today, but how they actually conduct themselves in His absence. Accordingly, we demonstrate our fidelity or lack of dedication to our absent Lord, by the degree to which we nurture or abuse our fellow-servants, by the degree to which we utilize for His glory the wealth, ability and opportunities entrusted to us or turn these into authority to oppress others and amass wealth and prestige for ourselves. The crime against Christ is not simply a question of misusing great sums of money (as in the parable of the talents) or of failing to make adequate, appropriate and timely preparation (as in the parable of the ten virgins). Nor is it simply the misappropriation of what belongs to our Lord,

but, rather, the combination of all of these that affects how we treat our brethren. No wonder Jesus included this facet of the terrible eternal punishment in His sentence of 25:46, because He is talking to people who confidently expect to be welcomed by Jesus, but shall discover themselves rejected at the final sentencing.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What are the duties of the "faithful and wise servant" assigned him during his lord's absence?
2. What are the new duties assigned to this servant upon his lord's return?
3. Quote the beatitude Jesus coined to describe the happiness of the faithful and wise servant.
4. Describe the conduct of the "evil servant."
5. Contrast the final fate of the evil servant with that of the wise and faithful one.
6. What does it mean to be "cut asunder"?
7. What is "the portion of the hypocrites"? Who are they and why bring them into this picture? Explain why the evil servant should share their "portion."
8. Define "gnashing of teeth" as Jesus used this expression here.

#### 4. Illustration of the ten wise and foolish bridesmaids (25:1-13)

1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. 2 And five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3 For the foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them; 4 but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5 Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. 6 But at midnight there is a cry, Behold, the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him. 7 Then all the virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out. 9 But the wise answered, saying, Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you: go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. 10 And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast: and the door was shut. 11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

- 12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.  
13 Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. In what way is this story of the five wise and five foolish virgins similar to the preceding one about the faithful, wise servant and the evil servant? In what way is it different?
- b. To what phase of the kingdom of heaven does Jesus refer in this story?
- c. In what way is the having oil or not part of the main point of this story?
- d. Do you see anything significant about the fact that the bridegroom made his appearance at midnight? If so, what does that fact suggest about the reality Jesus is illustrating?
- e. Christ has taught us to share what we have. Yet He pictures with apparent approval the so-called "wise" virgins as refusing to share their oil! How do you explain or justify this surprising selfishness? Or, is that what it is?
- f. The so-called "wise" virgins suggested that the others try to buy lamp-oil at midnight! Is not this a rather foolish suggestion for supposedly "wise" ones? What stores would be open at that time of night? In the reality represented by this illustration, would such a "purchase" even be possible?
- g. Do you not think that it was heartless on the part of the bridegroom to refuse recognition to a few hapless girls whose only mistake was failure to provide a little oil for lamps to lighten the atmosphere of HIS marriage banquet? On what basis can such cold indifference be justified? Who does this bridegroom symbolize anyway?
- h. From the details in the story, what may be assumed to be involved in Jesus' concluding admonition: "Watch therefore"?
- i. Since Jesus concluded this story with "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour," a point reiterated many times in these concluding illustrations, why do you suppose He felt He needed to repeat this concept? Did He think that we would misunderstand Him and act otherwise, if He had stated His view but once?

## PARAPHRASE

“The time when Christ’s coming is awaited will be a time when the government of God may be compared to ten maidens who took their oil lamps to a wedding party. They were to await the arrival of the bridegroom. Five of them were thoughtless and five were sensible. The foolish took their lamps, but brought no reserve oil with them, whereas the wise girls took containers of oil along with their lamps. Because the bridegroom was a long time in coming, the girls all became drowsy and began to sleep. However, in the middle of the night someone shouted, “Here comes the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!” At this all those girls rose and trimmed their lamp-wicks. The foolish girls said to the prudent ones, ‘Loan us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out!’ But the wise ones replied, ‘There may not be enough for both us and you. You had better go to the store and buy some for yourselves.’ While they were on their way to make the purchase, the bridegroom came. Those girls who were prepared went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was locked.

“Later, the other maidens also arrived. ‘Sir . . . Mister! Open the door for us!’ But he replied, ‘I tell you solemnly, I really do not know you.’

“So, be on the alert, for you do not know either the day nor the hour when the Christ will come.”

## SUMMARY

The fate of the unprepared admonishes us that adequate preparation must be made in time. Real wisdom, according to Jesus, makes its preparation ahead of time and is not caught unawares.

## NOTES

Chapter 25 must be treated as part of the great Eschatological Discourse of Jesus, begun in chapter 24. A deep, internal unity holds these parables together and binds them to the preceding parts of the sermon. (See “Let’s Preview the Following Parables” after 24:44.) The internal cohesiveness of these illustrations undermines the theory that Jesus could not have used these stories to illuminate His prophecies, or that Matthew is to be blamed for pasting together a collage of

disconnected vignettes. Rather, they are precisely the sort of imaginative explanations that Jesus Himself could be expected to use to shed new light on His fundamental statement: "Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. . . . You must be ready" (24:36, 42, 44).

**25:1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened.** *The kingdom of heaven*, here as everywhere, is the rule of God. Jesus' parables provide thumb-nail sketches that illustrate the typical style of God's administration, by holding up various phases of His government to be seen from different points of view. Departing from His usual formula, "the kingdom of God IS like . . .," Jesus said, *Then*, at the time we have been discussing, *the kingdom shall be likened*. The future tense points to that future time when God's rule will manifest the characteristics evident in the following story. Jesus singled out that phase of God's program which He will bring to fruition at the world's conclusion and whereby He will manifest His rule over everything. But to clarify why God shall judge as He does, Jesus must show that final issues have root causes that begin long before the final crisis. *The virgins* represent Christians who have been admitted to that phase of *the kingdom* that can be experienced in this life. Jesus shows by what principles all are being tested for their fitness to participate in the fully realized Kingdom to be revealed at His coming.

The point of comparison is *ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom*. Of all Jesus' illustrations this one sounds most contrived to the modern ear, because of the cultural difference between Middle East marriage customs and ours. Nonetheless, this story is a true-to-life slice of ordinary small-town life in Palestine. Allowing for local variations, the custom generally called for the groom to station girls at some convenient location, sometimes at his own house, while he went to his bride's house to bring her back. Upon his return, the girls were to meet the returning wedding party, lighting their way and honoring them with an enthusiastic reception, accompanying them to where the banquet would take place. Jesus begins His tale after the departure of the bridegroom. The girls are expected to be ready and waiting for his return.

The interpretation of the story is greatly assisted, because its Author stated the principle point (25:13). He is continuing to explain in what watchfulness consists in light of every disciple's ignorance of the Last Day's date (24:36, 42, 44, 50; Mark 13:35-37). If so, the disciples are to identify themselves in the *ten virgins*, while Christ

Himself is illustrated by *the bridegroom*. Because *they took their lamps and went forth to meet him*, in this respect the girls are all alike, a fact that underscores their shared awareness of his coming and their common opportunity to prepare. These girls stand for Christian believers in the sense that they had accepted the invitation to the wedding by being intimately involved in the wedding party. They believed the bridegroom was coming and committed themselves to share in his joy.

**They took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom.** These *lamps* were small, flat containers for fuel with a wick protruding from a spout opposite the handle. Mounted on a long stick, these lamps could cast light from their lofty position. Being small, however, the fuel supply must be replenished often. That all the girls *took their lamps and went forth* indicates that they intended to participate in the wedding joy. Their going forth *to meet the bridegroom* is expressed proleptically and interprets their original intention, since the moment of this actual coming and their subsequent going forth is not yet come and would not until vv. 6-10. But their expression of purpose symbolizes the public commitment to take part in Christianity's hope. That all ten girls began their watch prepared at least to this extent, then, alludes to Christendom in general. That they had *their lamps* pictures the possession of those external expressions of Christian faith such as baptism, deeds of mercy, congregational worship, benevolent giving, personal testimonies and prayers in the Name of Jesus, rites usually thought to be characteristic of those who intend to pursue the Christian life. This story brilliantly contrasts true disciples, who possess vital faith, with those churchgoers who only apparently enjoy Christ's inner life, even though they formally share all the outward characteristics.

No interpretation of this parable can give importance to the total Bride of Christ, the Church triumphant, as affecting the general sense of this parable's meaning, because not one word of Jesus actually brings the Bride into this story. In fact, in their manuscripts, some scribes mistakenly wrote in "and the bride" after *to meet the bridegroom*, apparently supposing that the bridegroom would be bringing the bride to his own home (or that of his parents) where the marriage would occur. This apparently was the custom more common in the ancient world. (Cf. *Textual Commentary*, 62) But the logic of Jesus' story does not directly concern His going to take His Bride, the Church, but simply His absence and what His people were to do

in preparation for His return. Rather than lose us in complicated details, Jesus simply directs all attention to one subject: preparation (or lack of it) *to meet the bridegroom*.

**25:2 And five of them were foolish, and five were wise.** This subdivision of the group precisely in half is not indicative of the proportion of the saved and lost among God's people. Rather, this division may only intend to stress that people will be divided into two classes: the prepared and the unprepared.

Jesus had launched the theme of wisdom required to prepare for His coming, in His original problem: "Who then is the faithful and wise servant" (25:45)? By terming these girls *wise* and *foolish*. He proceeds to develop that theme. Whereas in the foregoing illustration He amplified the aspect of individual responsibility *in relation to the group*, this time He shows how individual responsibility expresses itself *despite the presence of the group*. Because this division of the girls into *wise* and *foolish* is the essential point of the story, it becomes clearer why the bride could not accurately represent the Church on earth awaiting Christ's return. The one figure of the finally perfected Bride of Christ cannot be composed of both wise and foolish, of godly and self-seeking, or of conscientious and indifferent people.

**25:3 For the foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them.** Two views of their carelessness are possible:

1. They took no extra supply of oil, hence only brought the diminutive amount of oil actually contained in the lamps themselves. It would seem that everyone's lamps were lit from the beginning of their wait and continued for an unspecified period of time until the bridegroom came (25:8). If not lit from the first, then the girls had brought only that oil which remained in their lamps from earlier use which proved insufficient and, once lit, the lamps soon went out. This view is suggested by the observation that "the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps" (25:4). In this case, Jesus' emphasis is on their sad lack of ADEQUATE preparation.
2. They took no oil at all, even in their small lamps. This view emphasizes their complete disregard for ANY preparation. Yet their taking their lamps and going forth argues that they intended to make some preparation.

The Lord's judgment that these girls were foolish is grounded on the premise that they thoughtlessly left for their appointment without making the sufficient preparation foreseeably demanded by the usual

requirements of such appointments. That they could have so completely ignored their need of oil needs only one explanation: *they were foolish*. There can be no valid justification for a senseless deed. But this sad lack of essential foresight best explains everything that follows. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 216) identified these virgins best:

The foolish virgins are not the unconverted, for they make no preparation; they are not apostates, for they, after waiting at their posts for a time, abandon it and go their way; but they evidently represent those who enter the Church and stand at their post until the bridegroom comes, and are found without sufficient preparation to meet him.

What, then, is the *oil*? In the story the oil was an easily obtainable item which was all-essential to their function in the wedding and an integral part of the purpose for which these girls had been invited to participate. Because Jesus' major point is preparation or lack of it, the procuring of the oil is itself a true expression of the girls themselves, the concrete evidence of their zeal or of their indolence. Because nothing we do is purely our own, but is done by the grace and Spirit of God (cf. Eph. 3:20; Phil. 2:12f.; Isa. 26:12; I Cor. 15:10), the *oil* may well stand for the total work of God's Spirit in us to reproduce the character of Christ in us, outfitting us for that joyous Wedding Supper of the Lamb. (See notes on 25:9; Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:27f.; Gal. 4:19.)

Even if their foolishly taking no oil defies logic, it is not without a possible explanation. Their folly could be the logical extension of several psychological premises, any of which could be devastating to the Christian:

1. Lack of foresight? Could they not foresee their need to prepare for a long wait, despite the vague possibility that he might return earlier than he did? But the bridegroom tarried, their lamps died out and they had no oil. They failed to consider the possibility of delay and the consequent need for an enduring supply of oil to meet the need.
2. Indifference to the character and significance of the occasion? The neglectful girls took the responsibility too lightly to remedy their lack of foresight in time. Churchgoers' sense of the importance and urgency of God's Kingdom becomes dull with time. While they confess His coming in judgment, they simply relegate His return to some undefined future day of no immediate concern.

3. Lack of loving attention to detail? Where was that love that shows itself in conscientiousness not merely in great outward display, but also in the small, hidden, apparently insignificant things that are as vital as oil to an oil lamp? (Cf. Rev. 2:4; contrast Luke 7:47.)
4. Presumption? Did they suppose they could get by on whatever oil remained in their lamp from former use, like church members who rest on yesterday's triumphs for Christ as an excuse for not dedicating themselves whole-heartedly today? Or, perhaps they presumed, as Edersheim (*Life*, II, 456f.) suggested, that they could borrow oil from others in the group or "that there would be a common stock in the house, out of which they would be supplied . . . in the hour of need." By presuming to leave this phase of preparation to others, they exhibit no understanding of their personal obligation. They further presume that time would be available to replenish any lack, like the disciple who hopes for tardy repentance.
5. They possessed the *form* of preparation, but not the *content*, *lamps* for giving light, but no *oil* to keep them burning at the critical hour. In this respect they resemble people who go through the motions of religion, but do not possess the dedication to Jesus and the power of righteousness that give the forms meaning. (Cf. II Tim. 3:5.) Theirs is only apparently and externally a solid relation to our absent Lord. Plummer (*Matthew*, 344) sees the *oil* as

that inward spiritual power which imparts light, warmth, and value to the externals of religion. Christian rules of life, public worship, fasting and works of mercy are good, but only on condition that they spring from, and are nourished by, the Christian spirit. Otherwise, they are as useless as lamps without oil, a burden to ourselves and misleading to others, who naturally believe that so much external profession implies what, as a matter of fact, is not there. . . . The inner life of constant communion with the Spirit of God is the oil which alone can illuminate and render beneficial to ourselves and to others the religious activity which we manifest in our daily life.

6. But, if by *oil* is meant a tenacious personal faith and life-long dedication, the foolish young ladies represent those who truly believe for awhile, embrace the Gospel with joy, are illuminated by the Spirit (cf. Heb. 6:4-6), but, because of "more pressing duties,

cares or interests," fail in faithfulness to Jesus. Then, at the moment of spiritual crisis caused by the Lord's delay, they literally run down spiritually, and, without personal spiritual resources, must turn to others' personal faith and dedication to replenish their own loss.

**25:4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.** Although these *vessels* (*angeiois*) could be thought of as the fuel chamber on the lamp itself, the expression, *vessels WITH their lamps*, and the logic of Jesus' story, together, argue that He meant a separate little flask to add oil to the lamp's receptacle when needed. This would be especially true in light of the minuscule size of the Palestinean oil lamps in common use. Regardless of the lamp's size, the demand for a possibly night-long use would dictate an adequate supply of lamp-oil, and only the sensible girls had the foresight to be so supplied.

These had not merely the form of readiness, *their lamps*, but a continuous supply of content, *the oil* to fuel them. Such Christians' lives really fulfill the function for which they are invited to share in the festive joy of the Bridegroom. Really directed by the Holy Spirit, they genuinely believe and act like it. Their spiritual life is vitally connected with its source, Jesus Christ (John 15:1ff.). They can remain constant to the end.

**25:5 Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.** Since the groom had established no fixed schedule for his return, this delay is the critical opportunity that tests the foolish girls' real concern. Alford contrasted the unfaithful steward's attitude, "My lord tarries, there should be plenty of time," with these foolish girls' approach, "Surely he will soon be here, there should be no need for much oil." One assumed too much delay; the others, too little. Both misguessed and were caught unready.

*They all slumbered and slept*, i.e. "became drowsy and fell asleep." Nothing sinful here, because bodily weakness and the late hour combined to overcome their alertness, so they naturally succumbed to their fatigue. They all doze, but in a position so as to be instantly alert when the long-awaited announcement came. Their confidence, shown by their ability to sleep rather than bustle nervously about, suggests that all ten girls are convinced that they had done all they should to be ready for the happy occasion. Five have really done so. But five doze on, blissfully unaware that their shortcoming is becoming more and more obvious as their lamps burn lower and lower and their priceless chance to go buy oil, silently but permanently slips from their grasp.

Why did Jesus speak of their sleeping? Only as scenery for His story? Two suggestions:

1. Bruce (*Training*, 330), alluding to the main point of this illustration (25:13) observed:

Watching does not imply sleepless anxiety and constant thought concerning the future, but quiet, steady attention to present duty. . . . Sleep of the mind in reference to eternity is as necessary as physical sleep is to the body. Constant thought about the great realities of the future could only result in weakness, distraction, and madness or in disorder, idleness and restlessness; as in Thessalonica (II Thess. 3:12).

2. Plummer (*Matthew*, 344) said it well too:

This (sleep) seems to be a merciful concession to human weakness. It is impossible for creatures such as we are to keep our religious life always at high pressure. Certain as we are, and often as we may remind ourselves, that the Lord *will* come, and may come at any moment, either by our death or in some other way, we cannot live hour by hour as it would be possible and natural to live if we knew that He would come tonight or tomorrow morning. But it *is* possible to be constant in securing supplies of strength from the Holy Spirit; and when the call comes, whether by some crisis great or small in our own lives, or by the supreme crisis of all, we shall be ready to go out and meet the Bridegroom.

Hence, the disattention of sleep is not culpable and only apparently a failure to watch in this case, but is simply part of our human condition.

Saying, *The bridegroom tarried*, Jesus hinted once again at the delay in His Second Coming. (Cf. 24:48; 25:19.) Had He openly revealed His intention not to start earthward for two millennia, the early Christians would not have been moved to godliness and zeal by the sobering but stimulating realization that Jesus is due any day. Further, because the prediction of His return is dateless, it is exceedingly flexible, not at all binding Him deterministically to a firm schedule in any age. (Study Rom. 10:6f. in this connection: *chrōnos* is the root of *chronizontos*, "tarried.")

**25:6 But at midnight there is a cry, Behold, the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet Him! At midnight,** at a moment later than he was expected, when, because of the girls' fatigue and slumber, they were no longer thinking about the imminent arrival of the wedding party,

just like Jesus' delayed Second Coming. (Cf. Luke 12:38; Mark 13:35 where the uncertainty of His return date is further illustrated.) There was a cry raised by those responsible to relay the word. *Behold the bridegroom!* Again no mention of the bride, as in 25:1. Originally the cry of someone in the bridegroom's party sent on ahead to alert everyone to his arrival, this sounds like the gladdening shout of the archangel on the Last Day. This shout shall not arise from the human throats of prophets (24:23ff.), but from that of heavenly heralds (I Thess. 4:16), perhaps like those angelic voices that announced His first coming (Luke 2:10ff.)?

**25:7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.** Once again the girls appear identical in that they universally recognize the task at hand and give themselves to it. *They trimmed their lamps* (*ekômēsan*: "they arranged, set in order, prepared, put in readiness") by trimming the wick, removing the carbonized edge where the flame had burned the wick. Thus trimmed, the oil would burn more brightly with a clear flame. With reference to the foolish young ladies, this aorist is simply inceptive, i.e. they started to ready their lights, but did not complete the process, because the total trimming would include their pouring oil into the lap before lighting.

Although in our comments we have assumed it, there is no objective evidence that the girls' lamps had already been lit and burning during their long wait. Their trimming the lamps may be but the last-minute preparation for lighting the wick for the first time that night.

**25:8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out.** Even though the basis of their failure lay in the past, it is only at this crucial moment that these girls are jolted back to reality. That the *lamps are going out* means that the virtually dry wicks caught only for a moment. Because there was so little oil left in them, the flame could work only on the wick's fabric, not on oil with which it should have been saturated, and so kept sputtering, flickering and dying, no matter how zealously the girls tried to ignite them. They resemble people who try to coast along on the moral momentum of a past generation and suppose that their own superficial piety or forms of morality and religion have some eternal worth, even though totally void of faith and unreplenished from within by God's grace and personal devotion to Him.

If Jesus means that the girls never had any oil at all, having left for the wedding with absolutely dry wicks and lamps, He is describing countless members of European State Churches who are formally "Christians" but have never been born again. The same condemnation sentences also second- and third-generation Christians anywhere who simply grow up in the Church but do not share the spirit and faith of their fathers. Even though they appear to be Christians due to their exterior resemblance to genuine believers, these are nothing but a hangover from a previous age of true faith and zeal. They lack, because they never sought it, that absolutely essential, inner vitality to be capable of serving Jesus as He desires.

Only at this last, decisive moment is the essential difference between the ten girls revealed. (Cf. 13:43 notes.) The sensibility or stupidity of each is revealed by one fact: did they really possess the essential ingredient or not? Were they thoroughly equipped (II Tim. 3:16f.)? Their pathetic request, *Give us of your oil*, was made too late and to the wrong people.

**25:9 But the wise answered, saying, Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you: go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.** This response was . . .

1. REASONABLE, typical of these far-sighted girls, in that they continue to exhibit the same prudent logic that enabled them to plan carefully before.
2. REALISTIC. Theirs is not grudging selfishness that is unwilling to share its bounty, but a clear-eyed realism that understood their responsibility to the bridegroom. They must provide sufficient lighting for the entire banquet. To have divided their supply at this point would have reduced their oil supply by 50% and consequently shortened the duration of their contribution to the joy of the festivities by exactly that amount. Better to have five lights that last the duration of the banquet, than ten that burn out at mid-feast!
3. RIGHT, because the foolish girls had requested something to which they had no just claim.

How can anyone transfer to anyone else his own deeply-felt enthusiasm, his own profound convictions, his loving determination, or that hard-earned experience or his painfully acquired knowledge that cost him time to acquire? How can anyone impart to another his

own maturity or character, or that personal relationship with God that grows out of frequent fellowship with Him? These can be had only by personal acquisition: *go buy for yourselves*. How can anyone live on the spiritual assets of others? *There will not be enough for us and you*, is literally true, since no disciple possesses any more character or spiritual experience or hard-won growth in Christ than he absolutely needs for himself (I Peter 4:17f.).

Here Jesus gives the fatal coup de grace to the popular belief that some people are good beyond their own spiritual requirements, hence have more than sufficient to save themselves. He crushes that baseless hope that such spiritual giants can somehow share with their needy brethren. Some Jews clung to the all-covering merits of Abraham, many Catholics to the treasury of merit accumulated by the saints and Mary especially, some Protestants to the saintliness of a godly relative, while the Mormons baptize the living for the dead. The error common to them all is the supposition that the character of Christ produced by the spiritual power of the Holy Spirit in each of His people is a quantitative and transmissible value that can be transferred to others. Nonetheless, the all-essential oil must be one's own. None can be saved by the faith, zeal, hard work and sacrifices of others. Last-minute appeals for a change in the rules, Jesus emphasized, are rightly unavailing.

Considering the midnight hour, *go ye rather to them that sell, and buy*, sounds like a foolish suggestion quite out of character for the wise virgins. However, these girls were *wise*, not omniscient, for even the wisest of the virgins could not know the time-lapse between the announcement of the bridegroom's approach and the entrance into the feast. So, if but one shop-keeper could be awakened and induced to open his shop to furnish them their need under the circumstances, the advice of the wise was actually sound, the only possible thing to do under the circumstances. In reality, however, the time had passed to act on this good advice. The foolish girls may have considered the hint their only hope, and so attempt it. That they actually succeed in securing the oil is not implied by their later arrival (25:11). They may have dared return without it, foolishly hoping for admission anyway.

**25:10 And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast: and the door was shut.** In going to buy at this late hour, these senseless girls act perfectly in character with their former foolishness, not foreseeing

that the village oil merchants could have been at the wedding feast too, or that, even if the wedding procession moved ever so slowly to the final destination, the time lost would be too great to find a merchant willing to send a servant to open up and procure them some oil. Characteristically, they did not calculate this, just as they missed their other guesses about such things.

*While they went . . . the bridegroom came.* This is the same point made earlier. The crucial hour of Christ's return can strike at any moment, surprising people in whatever spiritual state they are then. Some might be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness, like the evil administrator (24:48f.) or caught off guard like the householder (24:43). Others might be simply asleep (Luke 17:34) or at work (Matt. 24:40f.). Other servants of God might be unjustifiably overconfident about the completeness of their own preparation, like these foolish girls (25:10).

Jesus no longer terms *those who went in with the bridegroom* "wise virgins," but *those who were ready*. Their wisdom simply consisted in their preparing before the deadline. By His saying, *they that were ready went in*, Jesus implies, "Those who were not ready were shut outside," a sentence He will confirm later. This is the moment of truth when the empty claims, the vacant forms and unmeaning rituals of merely external Christianity will be found useless.

*To the marriage feast:* even if there were other features in the traditional marriage, like the festive procession, etc., what is really important for these girls is their participation in *the marriage feast* itself. To share in it is to know all the joy of the festivities. To miss this is to lose the best part. (Cf. the marriage supper of the Lamb; Rev. 19:7ff.; 21:2.)

What terrible finality rings in the words: *and the door was shut!* (Cf. Luke 13:25.) Just as God shut the ark door, shutting Noah and his family in and shutting the ungodly world out (Gen. 7:13ff.), so also here the bridegroom orders the banquet-hall door shut, closing the prepared ones in and the unprepared out. The opportunity for grace has passed and forgiveness is now impossible, according to our gracious Lord "who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens" (Rev. 3:7). Until that moment, the door of mercy is open to the worst of sinners who repents; thereafter it will be closed forever.

**25:11** Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. Flushed and out of breath but still hopeful, the tardy girls rush back to the banquet-hall. Did they find one sleepy merchant

to sell them the needed oil? Because Jesus did not affirm they succeeded, this hypothesis must be discarded. In the nature of the reality illustrated, the oil of Christian experience cannot be gained after the Lord has returned. It will then be too late. So, their return probably means that they found no one to open their shop, and, in desperation, they now attempt to be admitted to the wedding feast without the oil anyway.

*Lord, Lord (kùrie, kùrie).* They do not address him as "Lord God," but as "Mister" or "Sir," since, for them, he is just another man getting married. However, their repeated cries remind us of Jesus' pained question (Luke 6:46) and of His judgment (Matt. 7:21ff.). *Open to us.* This distressed appeal implies that he should recognize them and grant them entrance. To the stupidity of not readying themselves in time, they add the final folly of demanding the impossible. By what right could they hope to function as bridesmaids to bring joy to the bridegroom, when, without the essential ingredient for such service, they were sadly unqualified to fulfill any responsibility as light-bearers at his wedding feast? They resemble those twice-a-year churchgoers who, without the spiritual vitality that gives power and character to the life and faith of the godly, nevertheless suppose that the Lord must welcome them even without it. How could they be filled with fullness of joy in His presence, when they do not share His wisdom, His Spirit or His character, enough to submit to the discipline of readying themselves for His coming?

25:12 **But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.** (Cf. 7:21ff.; Luke 13:25.) This solemn response means, "I do not recognize your claim to participate." In the Semitic idiom, in addition to its usual meaning, "to know," this verbal concept also meant "to admit or recognize one's rights or claims." (Cf. Exod. 33:12f., 17; Nah. 1:7, RSV; John 10:14f., 27; Rom. 8:28f.; I Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9; I Thess. 5:12; II Tim. 2:19.) So, while this bridegroom undoubtedly does know who these five girls are, nevertheless, because of their carelessness toward his feast, his disappointment moves him to treat these acquaintances *as if* he had never met them. He disowned them by treating them as if they had never been members of his wedding party, and left them outside. Why should he admit anyone who claims to be a bridesmaid, but who, due to neglect, never fulfills the purpose of their calling?

Why, too, does God mercilessly refuse to pardon what, on the surface, appears to be an excusable oversight? After all, can He not forgive someone for a minor unpunctuality who happened not to bring enough lamp fuel? But the "oversight" of the foolish girls revealed a serious character defect: they cared too little to surrender precious preparation time to him. He did not matter enough to them to justify their giving close, personal attention to ready themselves individually on time. Can anyone, who treats his own discipleship in a perfunctory way, who neglects to obtain what is easily obtainable and absolutely indispensable for participation in the divine joy and the very purpose for which they were invited, really object, if they find themselves thrown out for neglecting to acquire it?

**25:13 Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour.** This final word really concludes five parables that all accent this one point: because the final schedule lies within the province of God, hence no human can be trusted to know it, the only possible course open to us is constant vigilance. (See on 24:36, 42, 44, 50; Mark 13:33, 35; Luke 21:34-36.) Although Jesus' application covers essentially the same ground as the other parables, this story emphasizes how the truly far-sighted, alert individuals distinguish themselves in any crowd of Christians: they make adequate preparation in time, because they know that this spiritual maturation, which requires a lifetime, cannot be crowded into the last hour.

In this story Jesus does not spell out in what the watching consists. But the readers of Matthew's Gospel are not left to wonder, because, in His larger context, Jesus emphasized:

1. Remove all hypocrisy by consistency (23:1-4), by true humility (23:5-12), by a non-sectarian spirit (23:13-15), by real reverence for God (23:16-22), by moral equilibrium (23:23f.) and by inner purity (23:25-28).
2. Accept at full value the messages and warnings of all of God's spokesmen (23:29ff.).
3. Develop mental and moral alertness (24:44) which carries out personal responsibilities with diligence (24:45f.), working profitably for the Master (25:20ff.).
4. Show a sensitive concern for the needs of others (24:45; 25:35-40).
5. Do anything Jesus requires (28:20). And Matthew is full of information in this area.

*Ye know not the day nor the hour.* When our highest motivation should normally be a sensitiveness to the Lord, an eagerness to serve

Him, a quick-witted ambition and a zealous love, why does Jesus accentuate our fearful ignorance of the fateful Last Hour as the ground for watchfulness? Because, where love grows weak and attention dull, apprehension and fear may be the only self-protective mechanism left that will stir the coals of conscience into flame and shock us into dutiful alertness once more. Every day consciously lived in this uncertainty conducts us directly into deliberate choices to make ourselves holy as He is holy (I Peter 2:13ff.; 3:11; I John 3:1-3). However, this can function only to the degree that we really believe that He is to return certainly and unexpectedly. To the believer, therefore, this uncomfortable uncertainty is perfectly calculated to stimulate that conscientiousness required to produce the character He thinks essential to be ready when He comes.

This parable illustrates the inner spiritual readiness for Christ's coming. The story that follows stresses our outward expression of the capacities He intrusts to us (25:14ff.). In both Jesus teaches the strict individuality of our answerability to God: no one can hide in the group. During our present service, all stewards resemble each other in outward respects. At the end, however, those who have only the forms or the intellectual knowledge, but not the fulness of God in their individual soul and no loving response to the living Christ, will be finally and permanently denounced and divided from those in whom the Spirit really dwells.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Explain the meaning of the following terms as Jesus used them in this parable:
 

a. kingdom of heaven	d. lamps
b. virgins	e. oil
c. wise and foolish	
2. Explain the oriental marriage customs that shed light on the meaning of this story.
3. List other New Testament Scriptures that illustrate or help interpret the following phrases:
 

a. "the marriage feast"	c. "Lord, Lord, open to us!"
b. "the door was shut"	d. "I know you not."
4. List other parables that share the same fundamental points illustrated in this one, indicating which features are parallel.
5. State the one point which this parable shares with no other parable

in this great last discourse of Jesus, the point that throws new light on the main theme of all these parables.

6. What is the principal difference between the wise and foolish girls, as this is expressed in their conduct? In what did the wisdom or folly of each consist?
7. List the main points of comparison between this parable and the reality it illustrates.
8. What does this illustration teach about the Second Coming of Christ?

### 5. Illustration of the wise and foolish stewards (25:14-30)

14 For *it is as when* a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. 15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey. 16 Straightway he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents. 17 In like manner he also that *received* the two gained other two. 18 But he that received the one went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. 19 Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them. 20 And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents; lo, I have gained other five talents. 21 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 22 And he also that *received* the two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: lo, I have gained other two talents. 23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 24 And he that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter; 25 and I was afraid, and went away, and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, thou hast thine own. 26 But his lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter: 27 thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest.

28 Take ye away therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath the ten talents. 29 For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away. 30 And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the other darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Jesus began this parable by saying, "For it will be as when a man going on a journey, etc." What, exactly, is "like a man going"? With what does the word "For," connect this story? Do you think this "for" is important to the interpretation of this parable?
- b. Why did this lord distribute his goods so unequally among his servants? Should he have done things this way?
- c. Do you see anything in the situation that would indicate that the master's explicit wish was that each steward make him a profit? Do you see any kind of contract that would condemn the unprofitable servant and justify the others?
- d. Why did the lord praise and reward the first two stewards equally?
- e. What, if anything, does the expression, "Enter into the joy of your master," indicate about our final reward for faithful service?
- f. If this parable is often thought to teach something about Christian stewardship, what is it doing in the middle of Jesus' sermon on the Second Coming? What is the connection between stewardship and the Last Day?
- g. If the philosophy is correct that "righteousness should be its own reward" and that "we should do nothing for rewards," then how are we to understand Jesus who does not hesitate to tell stories like this one which promises high rewards to those who serve Him well? Does this not constitute a pay-off for being good and actually corrupt that good by its self-seeking, calculating motivation?
- h. Would not the lord in Jesus' story have gotten further with his third servant if, instead of intrusting him with but one talent, he had placed, say, two or even five at his disposal? Would not this show of trust have communicated more to the servant, motivating him to do a better job than he did? What is the lord's fundamental reason for not intrusting any more to him? Why did he give him as much as he did?

- i. When the lazy steward returned the one talent, why did not his lord accept it back?
- j. How does this illustration carry forward concepts introduced in previous stories Jesus told? What are these points of contact with the other stories?
- k. What do you think motivated the one-talent man to hide it rather than invest it?
- l. On what reasonable basis could that third servant have dared describe his boss the way he does? Was there any truth in the accusations he uses as justification for his fear?
- m. How do you explain the fact that the master did not debate his servant's evaluation? Was the evaluation too true and well-known to doubt? If not, then why did the lord use the servant's own analysis to condemn him?
- n. The master ordered: "Cast out the *unprofitable* servant." How does this description of the wicked, slothful servant serve to underline the point of Jesus' story?
- o. This entire story is centered around making money, either by profitable trading or by banking interest, and the only person condemned is the one who made no money. How do you harmonize this concept with "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20), "Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail" (Luke 12:33), etc.? If it is wrong to make lots of money, how could Jesus condemn the steward who did not make a profit with his masters' money? But, if one keeps making himself poor through charity, how can he ever become a good and faithful (= profitable) servant by seeking to make more money?
- p. How is it possible to take from a man what he does not have? Jesus affirmed, "From him who has not, even what he has will be taken away." Explain.

### PARAPHRASE

"The way God operates His Kingdom, which not incidentally affects the manner in which our lives are to be spent watching, may be compared to a man about to leave home on a trip. He called his slaves in and put his property in their hands. To the first one he committed some money equivalent to ten years' pay for the average day-laborer. To another servant he handed over the equivalent of roughly

four years' pay. The third man received the equivalent of two years' pay. The owner distributed this money to each man according to his relative ability. Then he went on his journey.

"The man who had received the largest sum went immediately to put the money to work, and doubled his sum. Similarly, the second man did business with his, and doubled his sum. However, the slave who had been trusted with the smallest sum, went and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money.

"A long time later the master of those slaves returned and asked them to give account of his money. The one who had been entrusted with the largest sum stepped up, bringing his profit. 'Sir,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. Look: I have doubled your capital!' His master responded, 'Good work, you excellent, trustworthy servant! You have shown you can be faithful with a small amount. I will put you in charge of something big! Come and share the happiness of your master!'

"Likewise, the man who had the two talents came forward, 'Master,' he began, 'you handed me two talents. Look here: I have earned you two more!' To him the master replied, 'Splendid! Sound and reliable servant, you have proven yourself trustworthy in a small way. I will trust you with greater things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

"Then the man who had received the smallest amount came forward. 'Master,' he began, 'I knew you were a harsh, stubborn man that enriches himself at the expense of others. So, I was scared and went and buried your money in the ground. Here is your money back.' But his lord answered him, 'You ungenerous, lazy servant! You thought that I enrich myself at others' expense? In that case, you should have placed my money on deposit with the bankers and, upon my return, I would have received my capital with interest! So, take the money away from him and give it to the man who now has the most. The person who uses well what he has will be entrusted with more, and he will have plenty. But the person who thinks he has nothing will forfeit even his "nothing." Also, fling that good-for-nothing servant into the darkness outside where people mourn and grind their teeth in frustrated rage!'"

## SUMMARY

During Jesus' absence, the present moment is a stewardship of God's goods entrusted to us according to our individual ability to

handle them. These are to be invested for His advantage, because an accounting will be given. However, there is promotion for good stewards of God's grace, but also crushing humiliation for those who do nothing to promote the Lord's profit. Thus, the period before Jesus returns must be put to responsible use in productive service for Him.

## NOTES

25:14 For it is as when a man . . . *For . . . as* (*Hòsper gàr*) unquestionably binds this stewardship story to what precedes it, but how? What is the connection?

1. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 217) argues that the kingdom of God in general is not the immediate subject, but, rather, the way we are to watch, thus linking our story to the conclusion drawn from the parable of the ten virgins (25:13). But this overemphasizes his objection to supplying "the Kingdom of heaven" as subject, as did the King James translators. However, the larger, contextual picture painted in Matthew 24, 25 is truly "the Kingdom of God," i.e. how He intends for us to understand and respond to various phases of His government. (See note on 25:1.) So, Jesus has not really changed the subject, but merely amplifies one more phase of it.
2. Rather than bog down in technical definitions of God's Kingdom, Jesus focuses all attention on activity, the human actions that will be judged by their true Lord and King. So, by saying, *For*, He proceeds to explain how best to watch in light of the fact that His return date cannot be known. The Talents Parable, therefore, teaches that our time, now graciously conceded to us by God, is most profitably used, not as the foolish virgins of the previous story, but in faithful, fruitful use of everything He entrusts us with for His glory, while the time and opportunity are ours, as the five wise virgins and the businesslike stewards of this story. The Virgins Parable rightly precedes the Talents Parable, because the former lays stress on the constant *state* of individual readiness and the need for spiritual power within, while the latter emphasizes the devoted, individual *labor* required to achieve it. Alford (I, 251) noted another antithesis: the foolish virgins thought their part too easy, while the wicked steward thought his part too hard. Continuing to develop his "faithful and wise servant" theme (24:45; see on 25:2), Jesus now illustrates how conscientious His

disciple must be in seeking his Lord's advantage through correct management of His affairs during His absence.

**A man, going into another country.** Once more our Lord implies that His absence from earth is going to require some time (cf. 21:33) and that His return would not be imminent (cf. Luke 19:11f.), a point repeated later (25:19). In this way He continues to correct the mistaken notion involved in the disciples' original questions that assumed that His Second Coming and the end of the world would be more or less contemporaneous with Jerusalem's fall. (Cf. 24:3, 8, 14.)

**He called his own servants (= slaves, *douloï*).** Modern views of ancient slavery cannot but warp our understanding of this illustration, since the relationship between masters and slaves in antiquity was not always that of ranting tyrant and grovelling serf. Rather, as Jesus implies, slaves could be entrusted with any phase of their master's affairs, even to the point of handling great sums of money. (Cf. 18:24.) Merely because someone sold himself into slavery to pay debts does not mean that he necessarily toiled at menial labor until his debt to his owner was paid. Were he a skilled artist, musician or teacher captured in war, or perhaps a good businessman fallen on hard times, his skill would be especially valuable to his lord. Hence, he could be expected to labor in his area of expertise for his master's profit.

These called are *his own servants* who, because part of his household, could be trusted with the employment he now has in mind. Here are Jesus' disciples and all those who believe on Him through their word and who accept responsibility to Him as His stewards. These are not worldlings nor hirelings, but His own property (*tous idious douloous*). Just because they belong to Him, He has a proper, prior right to their time and effort.

Nevertheless, we may not exclude unbelieving worldlings altogether from stewardship responsibility, even if they are not contemplated primarily by Jesus' parable. In fact, the ungodly are God's property too. Whether they acknowledge or understand it or not, their Creator has a proper and prior demand on them too. While there is a true, unique sense in which believers alone are servants of Jesus Christ, this does not rescind that ancient and unchanged demand that every man "fear God and give Him glory." This is the "eternal gospel" to every man (Rev. 14:6). The original, high calling of man was to be a responsible steward of God's creation (Gen. 1, 2; Ps. 8).

Where the former illustration featured women entrusted with a responsibility for which they must give account, this story introduces men similarly accountable, almost as if Jesus wished to place the relative human responsibility of both sexes on an equal footing before God. (Cf. 24:40f.; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11.)

As the sequel shows, *he delivered unto them his goods* for investing his liquid assets profitably for him during his absence. While not expressly stated here, this was clearly his expectation and his servants so understood it. Not putting all his eggs in one basket, this wise owner divided his assets among several agents whom he trusted to be responsible. Not merely logical business procedure, his plan ennobled and motivated his stewards to prove themselves worthy of such a trust. In fact, he was turning over all this wealth to men who were but slaves. This should impress them with the importance of their high responsibility and leave them determined to rise to the challenge this great honor entailed.

However, for the man in the street in first-century Palestine, such a parable as this is unquestionably wrong-headed. The Kingdom of God, for him, meant reigning, relaxing and rejoicing, not rigorous responsibility! But Jesus does not flinch from prospecting a hard, concentrated, risk-filled TOIL that requires attentiveness, creativity, determination and other requisites to turn a profit for God. Jesus thinks that our ability to work now determines our qualification to rule later. Hence, we are currently being tested. Shortly before Jesus ascended to the heavenly Throne, He acted precisely as this man by placing into the hands of His own people the Gospel and its precious promises of spiritual life, the means to obtain it and the gifts to develop it (28:18ff.; Mark 16:15ff.; Luke 24:44-51; John 20:21ff.; Acts 1:1-9). Then, upon conferring the administration of His affairs to His servants, He too left at once. Thus, the stewards of this parable represent, not merely first-century Christians, but His administrators of all ages.

**25:15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey.** His goods were *talents* of silver (*tà argùria*, 25:27), quantities of money on the value of which see note on 18:24. Therefore, these talents are not primarily natural abilities, as this story is often interpreted to mean. While its principles justly apply to natural "talents," this parable's initial focus is money. In fact, that the two kinds of talents are distinct in Jesus' story is proven by three considerations:

1. Because the distribution of talents occurred on the basis of native ability, or natural talents, the monetary talents must refer to the

- distribution of something each steward did not possess prior to that moment.
2. Verse 28 contemplates the taking away of the talent from one steward and giving it to another. Talents are something external to one's native abilities and of which, presumably, he cannot be deprived without violence to his nature.
  3. The talents distributed are uniquely the master's goods, something the slaves did not have until their lord entrusted them to them.

And yet it would be useless hair-splitting to attempt to distinguish further the wealth of Jesus Christ from our own natural ability, since "God is at work in us both to will and to work according to His good purpose" (Phil. 2:13; Eph. 3:20; Isa. 26:12). All that we are or have has been given to us by God for His purposes and glory. So, His gifts disbursed to us may be seen as distinct from our natural talents, even if these latter are empowered by the further abilities with which He endows us, whether these endowments be natural or supernatural. (Cf. Rom. 12:3-8; I Cor. 12-14; I Peter 4:8-11.) Therefore, in the reality intended by Jesus' illustration, these *talents* represent the variety and complexity of means whereby we can be useful to the Lord.

**To each according to his several ability.** Lying on the surface of this parable is the startling fact that it is simply not true that all Christians are equal. This sagacious master knows the personal character and business ability of each man and dispenses his possessions accordingly (Rom. 12:3-8; I Cor. 12:11, 18). How irresponsible he would have been to have required, or even expected, a servant with less ability to produce as much as one more experienced. So, in reality, the distribution commensurate to each one's individual ability was evenly matched, even though the sums differed. Merely because God saves everyone on the same basis (Gal. 3:28) does not mean He treats us all alike. Our regeneration does not dissolve our individual differences. Our bountiful Lord knows the capacity of the vessel into which He pours His grace, the ability of the person to whom He supplies His plenteous opportunities to serve. His very discrimination is evidence of His love, because He is too kind a Master to load any of His servants beyond their strength to bear it, and too wise an Administrator to want it any other way (Rev. 2:24; John 16:12; I Cor. 10:13). Happy, then, is the steward who understands that *to each according to his several ability* means that none may

unfavorably compare the quantity of service opportunities he possesses with that of others who have more or less than he. Finally, if the master's goods were all distributed *to each according to his ability*, we see that Christ's earthly interests are entrusted to all His people. There is no Christian who is not gifted in some way with sufficient means to fulfill his own share of the Lord's work. However great or small his part, for this he is fully responsible.

Further, as the sequel shows, there is indicated here a certain liberty of action, as if the stewards could invest their lord's money more or less as they saw fit, so long as their management brought him the desired profit. Here is forepictured our magnificent Christian liberty in that Jesus has not legislated nor predetermined thousands of everyday choices whereby we may demonstrate our usefulness to Him. This is decided, rather, by our own free response to every advantage and blessing He furnishes for us to employ in His service. Our free investment of His goods is controlled only by His very general directives that govern our free enterprise by furnishing generalized indications of His will without predetermining our specific choices. (Cf. I Cor. 6-10; Rom. 14, 15; see my Vol. III, 382ff.)

**And he went on his journey.** Jesus' Ascension is the key element that makes our stewardship exciting, because His absence leaves us fully responsible and because His unknown return date keeps us working against time to get as much done as possible for His glory before our personal, final accounting.

At this point some manuscripts insert the word, *straightway* (*duthéōs*), which other manuscripts and editors connect with verse 16. Connected with verse 15, the sentence would be: "Then he (the master) went away at once." Although this word, when connected with either sentence, would make excellent sense, which is better?

*The Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (63) rejects the connection with verse 15, not only because the limited textual evidence for connecting "immediately" with verse 16 is of good quality, but also because "this reading best explains the origin of the others. Further, Matthew generally connects *euthéōs* with what follows." However, (1) what would Matthew's general habit prove conclusively about one special case that may in fact be the exception? (2) Manuscripts that connect "immediately" with verse 15 are not only more numerous, but in some cases contemporary with the few that connect it with what

follows. (3) The sense of the parable must be determined from the words, not the words from the sense of the parable.

*The Textual Commentary* argues, "There is no point in the master's departing immediately; there is much point in the servant's immediately setting to work." On the contrary, if Jesus intended to hint that He would leave shortly after entrusting His earthly affairs to His disciples,—which, in fact, He did through the Great Commission,—then "immediately," interpreted in harmony with the history, belongs to the foregoing sentence. This point is crucial in order to correct the false notion of disciples who supposed He must personally supervise a long, earthly Messianic reign from a material throne in Jerusalem. Not only is His absence a doctrine they must accept, but also the suddenness of His departure.

### Two Intelligent, Trustworthy Executives

**25:16 Straightway he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents.** If, on the other hand, *straightway* belongs rightly with this verse, this servant is pictured as recognizing the preciousness of every opportunity to promote the interests of his master. Like his colleague (v. 17), he instantly grasped his responsibility to be a dependable trustee.

Why does Jesus relate that these first two administrators doubled their capital? merely to embellish the story, and not, rather, to indicate something of the time involved? How much time would ordinarily be required for a wise investor to DOUBLE his capital on the market of first-century Palestine? If this passage of time is significant, it implies once more the delay between the Lord's departure and His return. (Cf. 25:19.)

**25:17 In like manner he also that received the two gained other two.** *In like manner:* what is predicable of the former servant is also true of this one. The two-talent steward is no less successful than the fellowservant, even though the quantity handled and gained is less than half the other's amount. People with even less gifts than others can yet prove themselves equally faithful and diligent in multiplying the value of what Jesus entrusts to them.

This two-talent steward is not mere scenery in Jesus' story, because this man could feel the power of temptations to which, in relation to the other two, he would be susceptible:

1. Because he possessed less than the five-talent man, he could have felt deficient and incapable, and tempted to conceal his abilities.
2. Because he possessed more than the one-talent man, he could have judged himself one notch better than his inferior, falling into unjustified pride.

So, standing between the others, he represents both men's temptations to be arrogant or feel inferior to anyone with gifts more or less than their fellows. But the Lord who distributes these gifts has in mind that each simply utilize the abilities with which he personally has been gifted for his Master's glory.

### A Man Too Lazy to Try

25:18 **But he that received the one went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.** This unimaginative chap differs from the evil servant of 24:48f., in that the latter was openly and actively wicked, whereas this one simply does nothing. Unlike the overconfident, foolish virgins who made at least some preparation for the wedding, this over-cautious, unenterprising administrator errs because of underconfidence. He remains stolidly insensitive to his responsibility to gain a profit for his master. Ironically, he takes a greater risk of losing everything. This fellow is not a great waster, like the prodigal son (Luke 15:13) nor a great debtor, like the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:23-35). He simply hides what belongs to his lord and refuses to put it to work.

*He went away and digged in the earth.* Back in the days of the uncertainties of banking and war in countries where banking was untrustworthy, the earth itself became the common safe deposit box of the uncertain, a fact evidenced by later, providential discoveries of casks of valuable coins (cf. 13:44). So, this lazy steward really risked losing his treasure to some fortunate finder who accidentally dug it up. Far more praiseworthy would have been to risk losing the talent through investment, for he would at least have attempted something positive for his lord who, not unlikely, was thoroughly versed in the uncertainties of markets and business. Nevertheless, with the last shovelful of dirt piled over the money, he considered his conscience silenced. Perhaps he even prided himself on being both honest and prudent, even quite scrupulous. He would return it to its owner, possessing the identical worth it had when he received it.

But it was *his lord's money* entrusted to him to invest, not his own to remove from circulation! This over-caution is not simply an excess

of scruple. It is equivalent to a breach of trust. He refuses to be answerable to his master beyond the barest duty of returning the money intact.

Even before the final accounting, his true attitude is exposed. M.Dods (*P.H.C.*, XXII,575) applies this:

It is not without significance that the servant who did nothing at all for his master was he who had received but one talent. No doubt those who have great ability are liable to temptations of their own; they may be more ambitious, and may find it difficult to serve their Master with means which they see would bring in to themselves profits of a kind they covet. But such men, at all events, are not tempted to bury their talent. This is the peculiar temptation of the man who has little ability, and sullenly retires from a service in which he cannot shine and play a conspicuous part.

Ultimately, as always, there are really only two types of stewards in God's judgment: the trustworthy administrators who expend their best efforts to please their Master, and the irresponsible, undependable ones who, in the end, do nothing. (Cf. John 5:41-44; 8:29.) And these latter He condemns in no uncertain terms!

### The Turning Point

**25:19 Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them.** This period of *a long time* is the indefinite interval that tries the true motives and character of each steward. During this time the lazy steward could have repented and unearthed that one talent and hurried either to invest it or place it with the bankers for interest. The two faithful stewards could have grown careless and relaxed their efforts. Instead, they considered it simply an additional grace period to labor longer! This *long time* serves to underline the fairness of the judgment finally given, because the final account does not have to be in until all the servants shall have had suitable time to make their Lord a profit. This delay is itself mercy so that we might correct false starts, cover lost ground and serve profitably. *After a long time* combines with "he went away into another country" (25:14) to imply that Jesus' Second Coming and the final judgment pictured here will be delayed longer than people expected, and is parallel to other similar clues given earlier (24:48; 25:5; cf. II Peter 3:4-13).

It is *the lord of those servants* who comes, a fact which emphasizes how completely the time, energies, talents and efforts of those slaves really belonged, not to themselves, but to their master (cf. I Cor. 6:19f.). Could such a master forget to demand an accounting for the wealth he had entrusted to his slaves? Here, then, is the final judgment, or *reckoning*, which we all must render our returning Lord. (Cf. 18:23ff.; 21:33ff.; 22:1ff.; Luke 19:15.) That we too must answer is as certain as the wealth of privileges and material riches that pass through our hands.

**25:20 And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: lo I have gained other five talents.** *You delivered to me:* without this magnanimous trust, the slave could have done nothing (John 15:5; Luke 19:16). How gracious the privilege to be allowed to do anything for Jesus Christ! Considering our real worth, that He should trust us with such priceless treasures brings us inexpressible joy over this unjustified privilege (II Cor. 4:7; Col. 2:2b, 3)! And to think that, in some minor way, we can contribute to HIS glory, mightily empowered to do so by His Spirit, and then, at last, to be certain that even the most insignificant service done for Him shall be recognized,—is not all this the very definition of grace?!

*Lo*, means “Look here, notice,” as if the happy steward enthusiastically welcomed his lord to see the money for himself. Though all we do and are is by the Lord’s grace (Acts 17:24-28; I Cor. 15:10), it is also correct to say, *I have gained*, because our personal commitment and efforts to express our loyalty and love to Him do count (I Cor. 15:58). No wonder there is joyous excitement and unshaken confidence in our final reckoning before our Lord! (Cf. I Thess. 2:19; Phil. 2:16; 4:1; II Cor. 1:14 all speak of Paul’s joy at Christ’s coming, due to his converts’ faith. Our confidence before the Lord: Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:19; 4:16; 9:28; I Peter 4:13; I John 2:28; 3:21; Jude 24.)

### Rewards Beyond All Deserving

**25:21 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant.** Here is the true spirit and character of this master, that gives the lie to the negligent servant’s attitude. M. Dods (*P.H.C. XXII,575*) scores that ingrate thus:

(His view of God) is unpardonably wrong, and the very heartiness with which these other servants were greeted refutes it.

You hear the hearty “Well done!” ringing through the whole palace—there is no hesitating scrutiny, no reminding them they had, after all, merely done what it was their duty to do. Not at all—it is the genial, generous outburst of a man who likes to praise, and hates to find people at fault.

*Good and faithful servant*: what a glorious title! What splendid rewards are attached to it! What joys await its wearer! He proved *good* by his dedication to the task assigned him, and *faithful* (*pistòs*) by being reliable or trustworthy. He was not entitled “good and *successful* servant,” but *good and FAITHFUL*. Praise for this highly successful manager is not based on the amount of his gain, but on the quality of dedicated service he expended, as shown by what follows.

**Thou hast been faithful over a few things. I will set thee over many things.** How very little capital he had actually handled for his master: a mere five talents in contrast to his lord’s incalculable wealth and even to his own future responsibilities! (See Special Study: “The Reasonableness of the Redeemer’s Rewards for Righteousness,” my Vol. I, 198ff.). He gives beyond all dreams and deserving! His lowliest servant’s final pleasure is double because duty to such a Master is already an inexpressibly gratifying favor. So, if the wealth of gifts He entrusts to us in this life is, in His estimate, but *a few things*, what immeasurably greater treasure must constitute the *many things* over which He would set us later!

*I will set thee over many things.* Whatever *the joy of thy lord* entailed, his reward was not an extended vacation, but nobler employment. *I will set you over* means “you shall rule over” or be responsible for. While there is more work to do, it is to be an employment that involves reigning. Rather than be discharged from investment service, these stewards are advanced to bigger things. To the men who had demonstrated themselves eager and dependable at a lower level of responsibility, their master intends to give prolonged opportunities for even greater service (cf. 24:47).

**Enter thou into the joy of thy lord.** What is this *joy* in which they would share?

1. A feast to celebrate the master’s return, perhaps accompanied by manumission of the slave on the basis of his outstanding fidelity and industriousness? (Trench, *Parables*, 94; cf. John 15:15; Luke 12:37; Rev. 3:20). To share in such a banquet with his lord would be partial reward for his exceptional service.

2. The master's pleasure upon his newly acquired, even greater wealth?
3. The master's personal sense of joy over his servants' accomplishments?
4. Or is it "the joy of lordship . . . admission to fellowship in possession, partnership"? (Bruce, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 303; cf. Heb. 3:14).

All of these could be true of Jesus. This hearty welcome says to the wise and faithful steward: "I want you to share in the happiness I enjoy!" (cf. Heb. 12:2; Isa. 53:11). Servants who have their Master's true interests at heart can participate whole-heartedly in what pleases Him. They can work for Him forever, because they share His program and are satisfied with achieving His goals. Their heart is in their (= His) work. No wonder then, that unlimited progress lies ahead for Christ's disciples who take seriously their goal to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (5:48).

Nor is it any surprise, too, that Jesus teaches us to believe that the world cannot grant us honors or praise equal to His. Only He can commend and reward. Long before judgment He established this final commendation, so we would seek to please Him and thus keep ourselves loyal to Him, longing to hear from Him, *Well done, good and faithful servant*. (Study John 5:44; 12:26, 42f.; II Cor. 10:12, 18.)

**25:22 And he also that received the two talents came, . . . 23 His lord said unto him, . . .** He who received less gifts, a narrower position and more limited opportunities in life is commended in the same way as the one whose gifts outnumbered his. So, it is not the quantity of talents or the disadvantages of our social position or degree of education that determines our Lord's attitude toward us, but our sense of responsibility to Him, demonstrated by our diligent use of what He has entrusted to us.

### Self-righteous Dismissal of Duty

**25:24 And he also that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter.** After the enthusiastic expressions of graciousness on the part of the returned master, it must have taken no little courage for his little ingrate to accuse him of a grasping, tight-fisted attitude. But this trapped, badly-motivated hypocrite must make a flimsy self-defense of some kind. So he attempts to shift all the blame onto his lord for his own failure.

*I knew thee*, he says? How little he knew him! *Thou art a hard man*. Nothing would have been farther from the truth, had this servant but sought to promote his master's good, a hypothesis confirmed by the lord's expansive reaction to the others who did. With poetic justice, this servant's accusation will be fulfilled in his own case, because, ironically, he pushed his lord to be harsh with him, a tactic which succeeded only in slamming the door of mercy in his own face. But it was his own indifference to duty that created in his mind this image of his lord as *a hard man* who makes unreasonable demands and expects back more than he gives. He hoped to establish his case by two parallel illustrations: *reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering (winnowed grain) where thou didst not scatter* (sheaves to be threshed). "Others sow and YOU reap! Others scatter unthreshed grain on the threshing floor and then thresh it, and YOU take the wheat, the fruit of their labors!" He implies that there was no real motivation to labor, because any potential return from any investment, be it market or bank investment, would have fallen to his master, hence he would have gotten nothing for his pains. What hope of personal gain was there to motivate anyone to take investment risks for such a crusty, ill-tempered old man?

This steward's reaction is probably not intentionally insolent (Prov. 26:16). Not unlikely, he supposes that, under the circumstances, his approach is just, his words sincere and appropriate. His blindness to his own misconduct stems from a totally wrong view of his lord. He did not love his master, so he willfully misunderstood him, and in this alienation of sympathy, refused to serve him. By attempting to protect his own interests, he asserted his fundamental intention to work for himself.

His grave error is that of all sinners. Men justify their sin on the basis of a firmly believed but false view of God's character. They accuse Him of demanding what they suppose belongs to them. They assume that all the time, energy, talents and cash that flow through their lives really belongs to them, and that God's expectation that He be given His portion thereof is but an unreasonable, self-calculating money policy on His part! Ironically, there is just a grain of truth in the slave's words. All our work, our lives, our talents, our very being must be utilized to the glory of God alone. Nothing we handle is really ours. It would appear that He alone is enriched by our efforts. This is but half of the truth, hence more treacherously deceptive. In His story Jesus faces this accusation head-on, shouting for all to hear that . . .

1. God's gifts are proportionately bestowed according to our ability. He is so kind and understanding that He would never overload anyone with more than he can bear.
2. Our service is only preparation for yet greater things to come FOR US.
3. Our rewards are rich and desirable beyond all we could ever hope to deserve.

So, any rebellion against such a Master as Jesus arises from our real ignorance of God. No harsh, demanding Boss, He considers the smallest favor to insignificant people as done directly to Himself (25:40)! He watches for the chance to help the weakest servants and accepts the will for the deed, loves to praise, encourage and uplift. It is only a gross and deliberate misrepresentation of His Kingdom that could ever suppose that what is given to Him or done for Him could ever be lost or forgotten or go unrewarded (I Cor. 15:58).

25:25 and I was afraid, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth: lo thou hast thine own. *I was afraid*, he says. Really? He did not hesitate to insult his master to his face or return him the money without making even the smallest attempt to bring him a profit. The man feared making mistakes, so he did nothing, which was the greatest mistake of all. He implies, "Driven to it by your harsh, unreasoning character and compelled by what would happen, if I lost your money through bad investment, *I hid your talent in the earth.*"

How does God consider the one-talent man? This slave had the lightest responsibility of the three, but it was still no more than he could easily manage. Jesus rivets our attention on the man with the most limited potentiality and the least of his master's goods, because, in comparison to the highly gifted, more influential brethren in the limelight in the Church, we easily think ourselves handicapped and hampered with little means at our disposal to do anything for God. It is precisely because of this that we feel severely tempted to hide our light under a bushel, bury our talent in inactivity and then criticize God for not being more generous. We too are tempted to create the same hypothesis contrary to fact, "Had God given me more money, talents, intellect, etc., I would have produced more," when, as a matter of fact, we are not using what we have.

As this unproductive steward handed the solitary talent back to its owner, he concludes with an unconscious falsehood: *Lo thou hast thine own*. This is deceiving, because no account is given of his own time and activity, both of which were as much the possession of his

master as the talent. He was a *slave* (*doûlos*, v. 26), so he himself belonged to his lord, but did not, in reality, return to his master what was his. Although he had not squandered or absconded with his master's money, he cannot possibly escape blame, because his abilities, healthy body, time and energies were never used any more than the buried talent, but were all fruitless, as far as the master was concerned. Rather than confess any wrong, he boldly implies that his lord should praise him for his prudence and exonerate him from any blame for returning the money intact. Such is the depth of his self-deception, and the justification for his condemnation that comes next.

### The Premises of His Defeat

**25:26 But his lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter;** Feel the contrast that marks the "good and faithful" from the *wicked and slothful*. Whereas this steward defended himself as prudent, because he apparently took no risks, his master now attacks his inoperosity precisely because he had done nothing at all.

1. He was *wicked* (*ponerè*; Bruce, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 303 prefers "mean-spirited or grudging") toward so generous a master. Why?
  - a. Because he slandered his master first to himself, then to the lord himself.
  - b. Because he had not done his duty as slave required to invest his master's money.
  - c. Because his unwillingness to work was motivated by his disdain for his master's concerns, prosperity and clearly expressed demands before he left.
2. He was *slothful* (*oknèrè*, lazy, slow, indolent, idle). The master's proof of this accusation comes in v. 27.

*Thou knewest?* This is not unlikely a question to draw out what the slave could have known, hence could have produced. His master waives his own right to expect the energies of his slave to be utilized for his profit, and simply defeats the sluggard by his own arguments. *You knew?* "Then you will be judged by your own standards expressed in your own words!" This lord is not for one minute conceding the slave's judgment as true in reality, but conceding it for sake of argument. If the servant's argument means that the master enriched himself

by the labor of others, then he could have known that the lord would demand a profit from this servant's own labors. This alone should have made him more afraid NOT to invest that money in the surest kind of investment then known.

### The Proper Conclusion From Such Premises

**25:27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest.** Were the slave troubled by other forms of risk through speculative investments, surely he should have been comforted by the guarantees afforded by *the bankers*. Although it was illegal to charge *interest* on money lent to fellow Hebrews (Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:36f.; Ps. 15:5), interest could be charged to non-Hebrews (Deut. 23:19f.). Such a low-risk investment could have commanded high interest in those days and turned a reasonably handsome profit. But how apply this option in Christian practice?

1. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 883) notes Jesus' utilization of this argument in the master's rebuttal:

In passing, a safe inference would seem to be that Jesus, who tells this parable, is not opposed to responsible capitalism. Profit prompts employment and makes possible helping those in need, etc.

2. Those who discover little direct use for their talents in Christ's service may well put what they do possess at the disposition of others to be invested profitably. Do they have enough talent to earn income? There is no shortage of missionary enterprises, charitable organizations and Christian education programs to which those with smaller gifts may dedicate their contributions. While this seems not to be a direct investment of life and talents, the efforts of the front-line Christian "bankers" brings profit to Jesus and those disciples who invest for His glory in this way shall be suitably recognized.
3. Why should our Lord, represented by the master in His illustration, be so driven by the profit motive? *I should have received back mine own with interest*, is the word of God's Son. In Himself, therefore, He furnishes the example of the spirit that must drive His disciples: get in there and make a profit, improve your opportunities, buy up the market, know how to seize the advantage.

(Cf. Eph. 5:16, esp. in Greek: "buying up the opportunity"; Luke 16:8f.) How many Christians actually believe that their one goal in life is to turn every energy and talent into a way of making positive gain for Jesus Christ? To fail to grasp this is to contribute to the sluggishness and lack of progress of His Kingdom on earth. *You should have put my money to the bankers* means "You did not." Idleness, laziness and irresponsibility for others and their goods is soundly condemned in Scripture (II Thess. 3:6-13; Heb. 6:11f.; I Thess. 5:14; 4:11; Prov. 6:6-11; 10:4f. 13:4; 18:9; 19:15; 20:4, 13; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:14-16; 27:18; 28:19). Will a Christian rob his Lord? Yet, by preventing Him from receiving what is His right to expect and what He otherwise would have obtained, he cheats Him, even though the Christian returns his talent back to God in mint condition.

### The Lazy Are Dispossessed and Punished

**25:28 Take ye away therefore the talent from him, and give it to him that hath the ten talents.** This order proves that the master had not touched, much less accepted, the one talent from his indolent steward. As it lay there burning the useless servant's hand, it reminded him how many opportunities had been wasted while the money was in his hands. Whereas he expected the master to take the solitary talent back, incredibly, the lord rejected it.

As another stepped forward to relieve him of that unwanted talent, the limited stewardship of the inactive servant ended. There is now no further time nor opportunity to make good, exactly as, for the five foolish virgins, the coming of the bridegroom ended all opportunity for them.

Why give it unto him that hath the ten talents (cf. Luke 19:25)? Several reasons are suggested:

1. Indifference to one's stewardship finally makes others wealthy and impoverishes oneself (Prov. 10:4f.; 11:24f.; 12:11; 14:23; 17:16; 20:13; 21:17; 22:29; 27:18).
2. This owner may do what he will with his own possessions. God, too, is sovereign in precisely the same way. (See note on 20:15.)
3. Who was better qualified to accept additional responsibility than he who had demonstrated himself most capable by profitably handling the most money and in whose hands the master's interests were safest?

### A Universal Rule of Life

**25:29 For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away.** (Cf. Luke 19:26.) This rule of life in God's Kingdom is often illustrated in human psychology (13:12; esp. Mark 4:24f.). What is it that one *has* or *has not*? And how could anyone, who possesses nothing, be stripped of it? In our story all three slaves possessed two fundamental assets: their servanthood and their lord's talents to invest. The two slothful stewards grasped the preciousness of both, increased their lord's wealth and insured the permanency of their position. The lazy slave has now been stripped of his one talent, and thus, *has not*. He is now to be deprived of the last precious possession, his privilege to serve this generous lord. He had treated his stewardship as if he did not have it. Now what he really possessed all along *shall be taken away*.

This principle is one of life's moral laws, especially with regard to opportunities for service and abilities. To the man who had proven that he had the trustworthiness and ability to handle large sums of money, more could be entrusted. The more he was given, the more he could earn with it, the more he could be rewarded for his work, and the more *he shall have abundance*. Each trial of trust proves whether each of us is ready to move on to higher responsibilities. Those who know how to take advantage of their spiritual opportunities will be given others. But those who make no good use of theirs, however small or insignificant they may seem to them, will even lose their chance to do anything. (Consider Luke 16:10-12.)

### How God Sees Uselessness

**25:30 And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.** *Unprofitable* not only describes the crime of this servant, but also establishes the point of Jesus' illustration.

The slave's failure lay in what he could, but would not, do. His was voluntary inertia. He lacked, but did not want to develop, creativity, initiative, foresight, alertness, aggressiveness, dependability or responsibility. So, why should anyone want to keep such a useless slave any longer?

*Cast out . . . outer darkness . . . weeping . . . gnashing of teeth.* These combined expressions repeat a well-known paraphrase for hell. (Cf. notes on 8:12; 13:42, 40; 22:13; 24:51; see also Luke 13:28; II Peter 2:17; Jude 13.) In what other ways in this discourse has Jesus underscored the destiny of the wicked already (24:39, 43, 51; 25:12; cf. 25:41, 46)? These expressions picture a banishment to a futile self-accusation and frustrated anger. This punishment accents the severity of the sentence Jesus pronounced upon refusal to be stewards. (Cf. 21:33-41; Luke 12:45-48.) No great sinner by most standards, this offender is rejected for unfaithfulness to his trust by simply doing nothing. There is no need to break down the broad class of unconscientious stewards to show all the various degrees of failure. After all, if our Lord so severely punishes the unprofitable use of ONE talent, what would He do to those who squander or fail to invest MORE?

This parable compares with that of the Pounds and complements it. The message of the Pounds Parable is that people given identical gifts may produce quite dissimilar results and be quite differently rewarded in strictly graduated ratio to the differing diligence. The point of the Talents Parable is that people who have unequal gifts may still utilize them equally well or badly and be rewarded in proportion to their work.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Tell all the differences between the Parable of the Talents and the Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19). Show how the occasions on which each was told differed from each other.
2. Why are some given more talents than others? What rule did the master follow to distribute his money to each slave?
3. Of what phase of God's program is the Parable of the Talents illustrative? List the points of comparison.
4. What is a "talent" as this word was used in Jesus' story? What is its relative value? How may this value be calculated?
5. List the results obtained by the first two stewards.
6. Describe the attitude and actions of the third steward.
7. List the points in this parable that have parallels in other stories Jesus told on the same day.
8. Explain in what sense the stewards' master termed them "good and faithful servants." On what basis could he determine this?

9. Indicate the rewards of the good and faithful servants.
10. Explain what it means for the profitable servants to "enter into the joy of their lord."
11. What was the third steward's opinion of his master? Wherein was he mistaken?
12. How did the lord think his steward should have acted, given his present opinion?
13. To whom did the master give the lazy steward's talent? Why to him?
14. Explain how a person who has nothing can still lose what he has. What did the lazy steward "have" and what did he "have not"?
15. Explain the terms (a) "outer darkness," and (b) "weeping and gnashing of teeth."
16. State the central point of Jesus' story in one, well-honed statement.
17. What does this parable teach about the Second Coming of Jesus?

## 6. Illustration of the sheep and the goats

(25:31-46)

31 But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: 32 and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; 33 and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; 36 naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or athirst, and gave thee drink? 38 And when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto these my brethren, *even* these least, ye did it unto me. 41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 for I was hungry and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; 43 I was a stranger,

and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. 44 Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me. 46 And these shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into eternal life.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. On what basis of judgment will Jesus separate the sheep from the goats?
- b. How do you harmonize this Scripture's basic message with the teaching of salvation by grace through obedient faith in such verses as John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Acts 2:38, etc.?
- c. List scriptural statements, parables, etc., that teach that following Jesus and being a Christian requires a work, service and fruit-bearing, or that reveal the condemnation of every worthless, fruitless life that simply does nothing. What are you doing about it.
- d. Must we limit "the least of these my brethren" to the categories named: the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the unclothed, the sick or imprisoned? Who else should be treated with the same loving concern? Or do you think Jesus wanted the list restricted to those named?
- e. What does Jesus' emphasis on "all nations" gathered before His judgment throne have to say to the anti-missionary notion that each people has its own god and is happy in its own religion and should, therefore, be left alone as they are?
- f. When we view a needy person, whatever his need may be, how, according to Jesus, are we to react to him?
- g. Jesus implies that "all nations" will be separated into two groups on the basis of their usefulness in helping others. Does this mean that the Gospel is not really the final standard of judgment, especially for those who had not heard it? Or, does Jesus imply that all the world will have already heard His message, and now is to be judged according to its standards?
- h. Christians must do everything for Christ's sake and motivated by Him. If the sheep represent Christians, how can any real disciple be so completely unaware that he had served Christ by helping the needy, as to ask, "When saw we you hungry or thirsty, etc.?"

- i. Some believe that the sheep and goats who are judged here are distinguished from Christ's brethren, but nothing is affirmed about a judgment of the brethren themselves. Thus, the judgment in question is only of unbelievers, not of believers. How would you react to this?
- j. Is this picture of final judgment, initiated by the picture of a shepherd dividing sheep and goats, a parable, an allegory, simply an illustration, or what?

### PARAPHRASE

“When the Messiah returns in His splendor, escorted by all the angels, He will take His seat on His glorious throne. All the people of the whole world will be assembled in His presence. He will then separate people into two groups, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those at His right, ‘You who have my Father’s blessing, come take possession of your inheritance, the Kingdom destined for you ever since the world’s founding. This is because when I was famished, you gave me some food to eat. When I was thirsty, you offered me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you shared hospitality with me. When I was poorly clad, you furnished me clothes. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you visited me.’

“At this point the righteous will respond, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? or thirsty and give you a drink? Or when did we see you a stranger and welcome you into our homes? or ill-clad and clothe you? Or when did we ever see you sick or in prison and take care of your needs?’

“The King will give them this answer: ‘I can assure you that every time you showed these kindnesses to one of my brothers here, however unimportant he might be, you did it to me.’

“Then the King will turn to those at His left hand, saying, ‘Get out of my presence: there is a curse on you! Leave for the eternal fire destined for the devil and his messengers. You see, when I am hungry, you gave me no food to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me nothing to drink. When I was a stranger, you did not invite me home. When I was ill-clad, you did not clothe me. When I was sick or in prison, you did not take care of me.’

“At this point they too will ask, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you starving or thirsty or a stranger or ill-clad or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’

“The King will then answer, ‘I can tell you for sure that the extent to which you neglected to do it for one of these most insignificant people, you did not do it for me.’

“Then the damned will leave for their eternal punishment, while the righteous enter into life that is eternal.”

## SUMMARY

Christ’s second coming and judgment will be contemporaneous. His judgment will be universal, involving every human being that has ever lived. He will judge people, not on their Jewishness or any other superficial basis, but on their everyday usefulness and service to others.

## NOTES

### a. Christ’s second coming and judgment are contemporaneous

**25:31 But when the Son of man shall come in his glory; and all the angels with him; then shall he sit on the throne of his glory.** This illustration is not a proper parable like those preceding it, but a prophecy rich in parabolic comparisons. We shall better appreciate this concluding section of Jesus’ discourse, if we remember that He said it just a few days before His death. In the face of the worst that Satan could hurl at Him, He calmly sets it down as indisputable fact that He would return in glory to judge!

*Son of man come in his glory* instantly identifies Jesus as the great subject of Daniel’s vision (Dan. 7:9-14). No longer would His glory be dimmed by the real humiliation and weakness of His incarnation (II Cor. 13:4). By these simple words He proclaims several stupendous certainties:

1. Jesus Christ shall triumph at last! His total Lordship over all the world is now ultimately certain. To term Himself “the King” in v. 34 harmonizes completely with the Danielian prophecy of His triumph and His own self-designations here.
  - a. *He shall come in his glory*, returning to earth in that splendor

that rightly pertains to this regal state and is His because He is God's Anointed.

- b. *And all his angels with him*, not merely to heighten the effect of His glory by their splendor and multitude, but to execute His will (13:41f., 49f.; II Thess. 1:7f.; Rev. 14:17ff.).
2. For Jesus Christ, all history is rolling onward inexorably toward one destiny. It will not plunge farther and farther out of control in a crescendo of moral chaos with no hope of relief. Nor is it grimly whirling in cyclic idiocy, going nowhere, eternally destined to drone on, wearily grinding out the same human follies. Rather, every man and event rolls on toward judgment before our Lord Jesus Christ! There is a time and a place when earth's time-line stops abruptly in front of His throne.

*When the Son of man shall come . . . then shall he sit on the throne of his glory.* Jesus' Second Coming in triumphant glory will bring all earth history to a close and set in motion the Final Judgment of all of earth's people. Every feature depicted here by Jesus underscores the finality of this moment. (Cf. 16:27; Rom. 2:16; I Cor. 4:5; II Tim. 4:1; II Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 19:11ff.; 20:11ff.) Note the relative closeness of sequence: His Return and the Judgment occur relatively close together. The Gospels never intimate the presence of a great interval of time between Jesus' personal return and the world's end, as if 1000 years must separate the two events. The Millennium of Revelation 20, during which Christ reigns with His saints, must precede His return. (See notes on 24:30.) Because He calmly sits in judgment *on the throne of his glory*, the completion and completeness of His victory is expressed. Thus, the battle against sin and the devil are finally over. *The throne of his glory* may be so described for various reasons:

1. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 220) thinks it is "because by the decisions of that day his glory will be exhibited more brightly than ever before. All the obscure things in the past administration of his government will then be made clear."
2. It is because of the radiant brilliance of Him who sits thereon, a reflection of the true, heavenly splendor of Jesus, that glory of which the Apostles caught a foreglimpse at His Transfiguration (17:1-8 and parallels).
3. This throne is evidently His heavenly throne, identical with His brilliant "white throne" depicted in Revelation 20. There, as here,

the basis of universal judgment is the same (25:35-40, 42f.; Rev. 20:12f.).

4. It cannot be an earthly, temporal throne reconstructed in a material Jerusalem to be "the throne of David." In fact, David himself (Ps. 110) grasped the exalted spiritual character of Christ's reign and located the true "throne of David" at God's right hand, not in earthly Palestine. Peter (Acts 2:33ff.) revealed on Pentecost Jesus' exaltation to the throne of David at God's right hand, forever establishing the true site and significance of His present reign. There is no New Testament text that definitively promises a "personal reign of Christ on a temporal throne in a material city of Jerusalem" (Kik, *Matthew XXIV*, 113).

If this language is reminiscent of 19:28; 24:30f. or 26:64 which, in my view, refer not to the Second Coming exclusively or even primarily, but to Jesus' full vindication during the lifetime of His contemporaries, this similarity of language may be explained as a historical preview of even greater events. That is, this Jesus, who was so preeminently distinguished by earthly events in His own day (i.e. the fall of Jerusalem by the fulfillment of His prophecies, by the liberation of His Church from Judaism's thralldom; etc.), shall be supremely exalted to glory by His personal return at the Last Day. This is the final, glorious completion of Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 7:13f.).

#### b. The judgment shall be universal

**25:32 Before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats. Before him!** Before the humble Carpenter from Galilee shall be arrayed all of the world's religious pundits, political leaders, world philosophers, controllers of communications, sellers of armaments, heads of nations, taxi-drivers, housewives, priests, prostitutes, school children—saints or sinners all—standing heads bared, dumbstruck, all eyes fixed on the one Figure there on the throne at the center of the universe, our dear Lord Jesus Christ! Racial differences now have no meaning; historic national distinctions are wiped out. All forms of government that ever held sway shall now bow to the King on that throne.

*All nations* include all those who have ever lived. Even those long dead are now resurrected from physical death to stand before Him (John 5:28f.; Rev. 20:12f.). Otherwise, Jesus would merely sit in judgment over those nations that happen to dwell on earth at His return.

But *all nations* (*pànta tà éthnē*) must not be confused for a similar Hebrew idiom that refers to Gentiles, as distinguished from God's chosen people, as if no Jews or Christians are meant here. In this intensely Hebrew Gospel, Jesus' attitude toward *the nations* (*tà éthnē*) cannot be anything but highly interesting, because, in contrast to Israel, God's people, the Gentiles were so commonly distinguished by this term, that *the nations* is ordinary Jewish parlance for "the pagans." However, that Jesus is not using these words in this sense is evident from the following considerations:

1. He says not "the nations," but *all the nations*. Thus, the common idiom is altered by *all*.
2. His Hebrew interpreters would not have accepted His words exclusively in the sense of "the pagan Gentiles."
  - a. No Hebrew could conceive of "the righteous" (vv. 34, 37) as somehow excluding the outstanding representatives of the Hebrew nation, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and scores, if not thousands of others.
  - b. Nor would it be likely that many Hebrews would admit that Gentiles should be admitted to the Kingdom on so rudimentary a test as their good works without Mosaic Law. Remember the struggle in the early Church over this issue (Acts 15:5; 21:20ff.; *Galatians; Hebrews*)!
  - c. So, from the nationalistic Jewish standpoint, Jesus is talking nonsense, because His Jewish listeners would demand, as an irreducible minimum, that Israel be included as one of *the nations* to be admitted on the basis of its good works. But to admit Israel destroys the supposed idiom for "pagan Gentiles" here.

Therefore, our Lord means literally *all the nations*. In contrast to the foregoing Jewish prejudice, His point is precisely that the godly people whom God welcomes are not merely Hebrews, to the exclusion of the Gentiles, nor even vice versa, but, rather, anyone of any nation who proves himself useful to God on the basis indicated (25:35-40). As will be shown, only those who submit to Jesus' Kingship and who trust Him to know final issues, are finally accepted.

So, speaking originally to purely Jewish Apostles, who might have thus misunderstood Him, Jesus did not predicate final judgment on the basis of national Jewishness at all, but upon any man's real usefulness to his fellowmen; a standard of justice which all men can recognize (cf. Rom. 1:18-32; 2:9-16).

*He shall separate them.* Whereas other parables picture His angels as employed to distinguish the righteous from the wicked (cf. 13:41ff., 49f.), here He claims this as His prerogative. This is no contradiction, just a question of emphasis. What He orders His agents to do, He may be said to do for Himself. No angel moves, but at His word. *He shall separate them: all the nations* are not even to be judged as nations, but broken down into individuals. In Greek, *them* (*αὐτοὺς*) is masculine gender, whereas its antecedent, *nations* (*ἔθνη*) is neuter. (Cf. 28:19 in Greek for an analogous construction and concept.) For this last, definitive separation He shall need no last-minute, detailed scrutiny of the relative merits of each one of millions upon millions of human beings all resurrected or transformed live to stand trial before Him. He shall distinguish them into two groups as expertly as an experienced *shepherd separates the sheep from the goats*, i.e. according to their true character so perfectly well-known to Him who has pastured them for centuries (John 10:14f., 3f., 27f.). Though *sheep and goats* are commonly pastured together, they do not share a common destiny, because of their different natures. This nicely illustrates how completely human lives are merged here on earth, yet how decisively and permanently they will be parted at judgment. Jesus must remove many from His flock, because He does not recognize them or their claims to belong to Him. Ezekiel developed this sheep-goat allegory further than Jesus does (Ezek. 34:17ff.). However, in strong, clear strokes the Lord more simply draws the basic distinction which permanently collects people into two fundamental categories.

Mingled together as one great flock prior to this judgment, the great family of man is difficult to distinguish into the two classes. (Cf. 13:24-30, 37-43.) But each man will have written his own book (cf. II Cor. 3:2f.) the contents of which are already well-known to the Judge (John 2:25; Rev. 2:23; cf. 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1c, 8, 15). For Jesus to separate *sheep and goats* is a matter of no difficulty or delay. In fact, these books are not to be opened to inform the Lord of each man's deeds, but to document for the world the righteousness of His judgments based on what every person had done (16:27; I Cor. 4:5; Rom. 2:16; Rev. 20:12f.). Our text (25:34-36, 40) will establish an essential criterion whereby anyone may cause his name to be inscribed in the Lamb's book of life even from the foundation of the earth (Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12ff.; 21:27; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23). The Lord already knows who are His (II Tim. 2:19). His practiced

eye can distinguish a *sheep* from a *goat* everytime, even if everyone looks like a cross between a sheep and a goat to us! Even if on earth the race had been thoroughly organized into complicated categories by racial types, styles of government, economic statuses, technological development, cultural advancement, etc., with one simple gesture Jesus shall obliterate these unmeaning distinctions that had seemed so significant before. At the final Day, there will be just *sheep* or *goats*, only a twofold division of humanity: the saved and the lost (3:12; 7:23ff.; 13:24ff., 48; 21:28ff.; 22:1ff.; 24:40f., 45, 48; 25:2, 33). Such a twofold categorization of the race is striking, because great rabbis prior to Jesus had confidently decided that mankind's destiny must be distributed into three sectors: the perfectly just, the completely wicked, and those to be consigned to a Jewish purgatory (Edersheim, *Life*, II,440; esp. Append. XIX).

**25:33** And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. *Sheep*, in Scripture, is a common designation for God's people or Christ's disciples (7:15; 10:16; 26:31; John 10:2-16, 26f.; 21:16f.; Rom. 8:36; Heb. 13:20; I Peter 2:25). These sheep are further described:

1. They are called "the righteous" (25:37, 46).
2. They are invited as "blessed of my Father" (25:34).
3. "The kingdom is prepared for (them) from the foundation of the world" (25:34).

Among Semitic peoples, *goats* are highly prized along with sheep. Their hair or wool may be of various colors (Gen. 30:32—31:13), although sheep's wool is spoken of as white or snow-colored (Ps. 147:16; Isa. 1:18; Ezek. 27:18 "white wool"), while goats were generally dark colored (Song 4:1? cf. "tents" of goat-hair, 1:5?). Since in a nomadic society a person's wealth could be calculated by the size of his flocks of goats and sheep, there would be no natural prejudice against goats as animals. Perhaps Jesus chose goats as the contrary of sheep, simply because they are so commonly associated together in the flocks and are separated by shepherds. They naturally lent themselves to the purpose of Jesus' graphic presentation of judgment. Helplessness and total dependence on the shepherd characterize sheep, whereas goats are more headstrong and daring. It may be these latter characteristics that suggest the figurative use to describe people.

*Set . . . on his right hand . . . on the left.* This arrangement follows well-established tradition: *the right hand* signified acceptance and

honor; *the left*, rejection. (Cf. I Kings 2:19; Ps. 45:9; 110:1; Eph. 1:20; Matt. 26:64, etc.) This simple act by Jesus instantly indicates the King's final judgment on everyone. Judgment is actually all over at this point. What follows is not the deciding of anyone's fate, but the rewarding or sentencing and His justification in either case.

That Christians shall be brought before Christ in judgment should not be questioned by reference to texts like John 3:18 or 5:24, when texts like Romans 14:10 and II Corinthians 5:10 reveal that we must appear before His tribunal. The former texts correctly affirm that a Christian will not be *condemned* in court because of his sins, because these shall have been forgiven him for his faith in the grace of Christ. The latter passages picture our appearance before the Judge, without stating our sentence of acquittal. Not one of our sins will be discussed, only our acts of practical helpfulness.

c. The basis of judgment:  
everyday usefulness and service to others  
(25:34-45)

**25:34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.** Ezekiel had depicted God as Shepherd who would care for His sheep and judge them until the time He would establish His "Servant David" over them to tend them and be their true shepherd (Ezek. 34:23f.). This great Davidic Shepherd was also to be Israel's true King (Zech. 9:9; Ps. 2). So, while it may appear unusual in the Gospels that the Shepherd should also be Judge and King, it is neither illogical nor unforeseen, but most appropriate, because only those who have a true shepherd's heart are fit to be kings or judges over God's people (Ezek. 34; Zech. 10:3; 11:3, 5-17). Although Jesus has already appeared in Matthew as "king of the Jews" (2:2) and "king of Zion" (21:5), this is the first and only occurrence of His using this regal title for Himself. To entitle Himself *King* in this context is tantamount to affirming His own deity. (Cf. I Tim. 6:15; Rev. 19:13-16.)

*Come, ye blessed of my Father.* Whether this expression (*toû patròs mou*) be seen as genitive or ablative, the concept is magnificent: they are blessed because they belong to God or their blessedness originates

with Him. (Cf. Eph. 1:3-14; II Cor. 1:3f.) When their compassionate mercy toward the needy, the unworthy and those who could not pay them back, is so characteristic of God Himself (Deut. 10:17ff.), hence shows their true spiritual kinship to Him (cf. 5:44-48; Luke 6:27-36), should not they *inherit* who are most kin to Him?! (Cf. Rom. 8:16f.; I Peter 1:4; I John 3:1-3.)

*To inherit the kingdom*, from the viewpoint of the Hebrew listener, means to take possession as rightful heir of all that Hebrew history had prepared Jewish people to long for, i.e. the perfect, total, eternal government of God in all realms of His world. (Cf. II Peter 1:11.) But to *the righteous*, what is *the kingdom* to be inherited?

1. While there is a beautiful sense in which to *inherit* anything of God's is to be recognized as His child, this does not mean He intends to abdicate in favor of His renewed humanity. It is not His sovereign universal rule of all realms of the universe that they inherit, for He shall continue to be King in this sense (I Cor. 15:28; Rev. 11:15; I Tim. 1:17; 6:15f.).
2. As Plummer (*Matthew*, 350f.) expressed it, "This King not only comes in His Kingdom, but has kingdoms to bestow, which have been waiting throughout all time for their proper sovereigns." (Cf. Luke 12:32; 19:17, 19; Dan. 7:27; Rev. 2:26f.; 3:21; 5:10; see my note on Matt. 5:10.) In this higher, nobler sense, then, WE shall be the kings and lords over whom Jesus shall reign as "King of kings and Lord of lords!" (Lenski, *Matthew*, 990). Before this judgment, we are but heirs of hope (Rom. 8:15-25; Gal. 4:6-7; Heb. 6:12; I Peter 1:4). However, because of this judgment, we really inherit all that the Lord promised. (Cf. II Peter 1:10f.) This does not mean we were never "in the Kingdom" before (Col. 1:13). Rather, we come into full possession of that for which we have spent our life (Acts 14:22), the "new heaven and new earth wherein dwells righteousness" (II Peter 3:13), where God is sole Ruler, sin is forever banished and all things are subject to Him (I Cor. 15:24-28).
3. Because it is to be a *kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*,
  - a. It is not of recent date. Jesus affirmed, "In my Father's house ARE many mansions" already destined since the world's founding for God's children (John 14:2). But, if He Himself subsequently affirmed, "I go to prepare a place for you," how, then, is everything fully ready since before man's creation? Before

- creating man, God purposely designed such a *Kingdom* as would be suitable for man. But its pure character demanded that the conditions be established whereby sinful man could enter into it. Thus, without Christ's part there could be no place for unredeemed sinners. So, His atonement, forgiveness and intercession prepare a place for us with God. By establishing the real, spiritual basis of this Kingdom, Jesus simply carried out all God had projected since before the world's foundation.
- b. It fits our needs. This kingdom was designed specifically for God's people, in contrast to the fate of the wicked which was really reserved for someone else, the devil and his crowd.
  - c. What begins on this world's Last Day, therefore, is but the successful completion of the personal eternal purpose of our sovereign God. The Kingdom we are to enjoy is no makeshift, contingency plan. Our future rule is but the realization of the unalterable, ultimate goal of the sovereign Lord of the universe (20:23; John 17:24; Eph. 1:3ff.; I Peter 1:19f.; I Cor. 2:9f.).

Is it just possible, therefore, that *the kingdom we inherit* is that original sovereignty for which God created us (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 8:3-9)? Will He place us once more in His Paradise where there shall be no more curse, crying or death, where He shall live with man forever and man with Him in perfect communion? (Cf. Rev. 2:7, 11, 26; 3:5, 21; 21:3, 4, 6f.; 22:1-5.) Is it thinkable that *the original kingdom* we were designed and created to *inherit* shall finally be ours? If so, adore Him who can turn Eden episode with its aftermath of sin and death, into a proving ground for His saints and a battleground on which to defeat Satan! Worship Him whose program could not be defeated, despite a seemingly interminable interlude of several millennia!

### Love, the True Test of Discipleship to Jesus

**25:35 For I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; 36 naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison and ye came unto me.** This is the standard of values that justifies the sentence just pronounced upon the righteous. This norm is so strikingly simple that some commentators incline to apply it also to men totally ignorant of Christ. They assume that the unconsciousness, with which the righteous did their deeds of love, proves that their motivation was natural, as opposed to revealed, religion, and that Jesus here welcomes

their love which prompted their deeds *in lieu of* intelligent faith in Him. But may it be correctly supposed that ANYONE, who does not know Jesus' grace or the power of His Spirit, could do consistently what is described here for any prolonged time without eventually faltering and failing? Where is the moral power in paganism to meet even this standard of justice which apparently all nations could recognize? Where, apart from God's Spirit, are men stimulated and empowered to love so consistently as Jesus pictures here?

Jesus' point is not that, in the case of anyone ignorant of Christ, sentence will be given on the basis of good deeds, but, rather, that judgment is based on usefulness to God and man, rather than on national Jewishness or any other sectarian superficiality. Although He addressed a Jewish context, saying what well-versed Hebrews could have expected Him to say, the surprise is that racial Jewishness is so far from being a prime requisite that it is not even a peripheral consideration!

Such a standard is easily justified. This kind of thoughtful usefulness to others and open-handed generosity proves our likeness to God. (Cf. God's argument in Deut. 15:1ff. and Jesus' restatement in Luke 6:30-36; Matt. 5:42-48.) Such steady, unstinting concern for the unfortunate, the little people and for those unable to pay, is proof of our similarity to Jesus Himself who so magnanimously mingled with and lifted the fallen (Luke 15! Matt. 9:9-13; II Cor. 8:9; 5:21; Rom. 5:6-8). Bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2) links us with the great Burden-bearer (Isa. 53:4-6). Such open-hearted liberality proves also how much we really trust our heavenly Father to provide our own needs and how much we actually believe He can always make us rich enough to be generous (6:19-34; II Cor. 9:8-11). This generous spirit toward our fellow servants illustrates just how clearly we have understood the grace we have received from our own gracious Lord and King (18:21-35). Even though those who were *hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and in prison* put themselves in debt to us by accepting from us food, drink and spiritual refreshment, we have really learned to "forgive our debtors" (6:12, 14f.). Only thus can anyone obtain mercy (5:7). Grace is for the grateful and the gracious, not for the hard-hearted and tight-fisted. So, why should not a salvation by grace through faith be measured by the reality of the very deeds that prove this faith real (Rom. 2:6; Matt. 16:27; I Cor. 3:8; II Cor. 5:10; James 1:27; 2:14-26; I John 3:14-18; 4:20f.; Rev. 22:12). Only by the acid test of DEEDS of humble

usefulness and daily mercy are our faith, love and appreciation of grace proven real (John 13:35; I Cor. 13). The contrary is also demonstrated by their absence. (See on 25:42.)

Jesus could not have added, "I was ignorant and erring, and you instructed me and led me to repent, and I was forgiven," lest we misunderstand His purity, true identity and consequent authority. However, had He done so, it would have been marvelously appropriate with respect to every one of His brethren here. Our own brotherly intercession for them, pleading with them to repent and our sacrificing self for them, proves how much we grasp and appreciate His perfect High-priesthood (Heb. 4:14—5:10; 7:26f.).

Noteworthy is the peculiar character of these deeds. Rather than highlight some great, newsworthy accomplishments like prophecy, casting out demons or miracles (7:22), Jesus underscores simple, common deeds of kind helpfulness that even the most insignificant, least known disciple could do for someone else.

For many whose prime religious life-emphasis is attention to the smooth functioning of ecclesiastical machinery and the construction of imposing institutional structures, the great surprise is Jesus' stunning lack of interest in most of our statistics thought so significant: how many miracles wrought, how many demons cast out, how many pages of prophecy penned, how many bodies present in our religious meetings, how much money given, how much our buildings are worth, how many prayers said, sermons preached or Bible verses memorized. The only finally important question is: how can I successfully serve a Lord who longs to help the lonely and the needy, unless I show Him that I love Him by seeking to serve those very unfortunates that He loves and died to save and serve? (Cf. Gal. 4:19; 2:20; Eph. 3:16f.) So, the final aim of all growth in piety is to make us more like God, to put the mind of Christ in us and to cause us to act as He did (I Peter 2:21ff.; I John 4:17-21; Rom. 8:29).

How very easy, then, it is for ANYONE however great or small, to please Jesus! All one must do is love perfectly, doing the things that anyone could do to provide the needs of common people we meet everyday. If this seems simplistic, recall what Jesus thinks is required to love perfectly. (See notes on 5:44-48; 7:12.) Such unpretentious, unstinting altruism does not spring from non-Christian philosophy, but is the natural expression of a new creature, empowered by a new

Spirit and possessed with a new love. So, mere humanistic charity without faith in Jesus has no hope of final justification on the basis of our text.

That there should be striking verbal parallels between Jesus' words here and the pre-Christian *Testament of Joseph* 1:5f., should occasion no surprise. Rather, more surprising would have been Jesus' ignorance of the literature of His own people. But the Lord turned that language upside down, since "Joseph" credits God with helping in each case, whereas Jesus the Lord Himself credits common, generous people with assisting Him in His need.

*Ye took me in, though a stranger.* (Cf. Judg. 19:18; Heb. 13:1f.) This warm hospitality welcomes the stranger into our own family circle, sharing whatever is needed (III John 5-8, 10; Titus 3:13f.). *In prison and ye came unto me*, in context with predictions of Christian persecutions, calls believers to identify with the imprisoned (Heb. 10:32ff.; 13:3). But with respect to non-Christians incarcerated for crimes, His people may labor within existing prison systems to bring them Christ's love and message.

### Self-forgetful, Utterly Humble Service

**25:37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry and fed thee? or athirst, and gave thee drink? 38 And when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?** How could any informed Christian, whose every deed and attitude should be expressed out of his love for Christ and in conformity to His will, ever be so surprised as to ask this? Some assert that no one who has ever known a personal relationship to Jesus could ever say what is recorded here. Consequently, they decide that *the righteous* here are not Christians, adducing the following reasons:

1. Their award is based on works, not expressly on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ.
  - a. However, Christians too will be judged *as believers* on the basis of what their deeds reveal about the reality of their faith (James 2:14-26; Rom. 2:6-11; Matt. 16:27; II Cor. 5:10).
  - b. To consider pagan unbelievers who have never heard of Christ as saved specifically because all their deeds of love had been done to and for Christ, even though they did not so intend them and

only discovered it at this tribunal, is to show extraordinary laxity quite out of harmony with the general trend of New Testament doctrine. (Cf. Rom. 3:10-18, 23; 6:23; 11:32.) No interpretation of this text can be true that undermines the three mainsprings of Christian evangelism: the conviction that (1) all men indiscriminately are really sinners and damned; (2) that Jesus Christ is their only God-appointed Savior; and (3) that Christian evangelism is the divinely appointed means for bringing the really lost to the only Savior (Rom. 10:9-17).

- c. Further, are pagans so really well-known for the kind of continuous, unselfish hospitality and generosity Jesus pictures as having been done for Him? (Cf. notes on 11:5.) Or, is it, rather, the pagans themselves who comment on the remarkable Christian open-handedness unknown among the unconverted?
2. These words (vv. 37-39) cannot be "the language of humility because Christian humility cannot be thought of as devoid of consciousness" (Biederwolf, 357, citing Olshausen).
  - a. But are Christians really as conscious of their every act as, ideally, they should be or would desire it? Are we really un-faillingly aware that every needy person we confront represents Jesus Christ to us? Is it impossible that on that Last Great Day we could (in Alford's words) be "overwhelmed at the sight of the grace which has been working in and for" us? Is there no room for true surprise at just how much eternal good we actually shall have done as the fruit of Christ's Spirit in us or how far-reaching our influence for good shall have been?
  - b. Is there no room for genuine, child-like amazement that our common, lowly deeds of human sympathy, which in the course of our earth-life seemed only the right thing to do, should be exalted by the King of heaven and treated as having been done to Him personally? Can there be no happy astonishment that the many tiny favors, now long-forgotten, which were but the natural fruit of the maturation of Christ's life in us, should suddenly reappear as Jesus' reason for welcoming us home?

So, the supposition, that *the righteous* here could not be Christians, is less well-grounded than originally thought, and it becomes unnecessary, with McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 221) to obviate the problem by considering this conversation in Jesus' story as something that could not occur at judgment, or to think that most Christians "will have already learned the lesson here taught." The genuine astonishment of the Christians is completely comprehensible under the following conditions:

1. **THE TRUE ABSENCE OF CHRIST FROM THE WORLD AND THE OMNIPRESENCE OF THE HUMAN CONDITION.** In the pressure of everyday life it is easy to forget that we really serve Christ. So, when the plight of another human being comes to our attention, perhaps we may not perceive the image of Jesus in them. Our decision to help them may come simply from our loving awareness of their need and our desire to minister to them. The figure of Christ is often quite obscured by the nitty-gritty realism of their need, so our kindness in meeting it really reflects the natural, spontaneous reaction of a godly, loving heart. Rather than calculate how much eternal reward we pile up by serving Jesus directly, we simply act out the true instincts of our Christ-like graciousness by serving the other human being simply for the sake of helping him. This sets the stage, however, to be surprised that such long-forgotten, spontaneous service should be considered as rendered to the King Himself.
2. **OUR IMPOSSIBILITY TO DO SERVICE DIRECTLY TO JESUS AND HIS IDENTIFICATION WITH HIS PEOPLE.** The Christ reigns from a heavenly throne. No mortal can approach Him with gifts of food, raiment or gems. None can serve Him, unless He should consider every service of our lives, however apparently insignificant they seem to us, as done to Himself. Only thus can we find service and recognition where, before, we dared not dream it possible. So, because of His kindly identification with every one of His creatures, our King graciously attributes this service to us. (Cf. Acts 9:1-4, 13; John 15:18—16:4.)
3. **THE GREAT DISPROPORTION BETWEEN THE SERVICE RENDERED AND THE REWARD GIVEN.** When Christians depend on God's grace all their lives and merely respond to it in gratitude by serving others, suddenly find themselves endowed with abundance exceeding all they could ask or imagine, such magnificence seems a disproportionate reward for so very little done for God during their lifetime. So they stand frankly embarrassed to realize that Jesus is serious in granting them infinite, eternal glory on the basis of what they supposed was insignificant to Him.

No wonder, then, that Judgment must occur, in order to reveal to everyone what is now utterly unperceived by the majority and only dimly grasped by a few, i.e. the actual character and influence of men's lives and the extent to which each truly harmonized or contrasted with God's will for each one. No wonder, too, that only Jesus

Christ Himself is qualified to decide on the relative significance of our small kindnesses, because only He can know how truly our conduct toward others really served His great purpose, how far-reaching our Christ-likeness influenced others to further godliness and how much the world was made a better place because of some apparently insignificant deed we did years ago. No wonder, too, that His evaluation of men's conduct is so radically different from the estimate that both the good and the evil place on their own deeds.

Is not this paragraph motive to love, praise and serve Jesus forever? Our generous Lord considers as headline news the many little kindnesses we have done for years and totally forgotten as not worth mentioning! He erects an eternal monument to commemorate a glass of cold water, a flat tire changed for a handicapped person, a tear dried on the face of a child, additional time to pay offered a family strapped by unemployment, and countless other deeds! This simple declaration of Jesus tests our discipleship to the core: do we believe His world real? Dare we admit the hidden Christ in the ragged need of our neighbor? Can we confess the riches of the invisible Christ to be greater wealth than all the pleasures of indifference to our neighbor's needs? Can we live as if we could see Him who is invisible? (Cf. Heb. 11:25-27.)

**25:40** And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me. Our concept of this wide-sweeping criterion is influenced by two factors: (1) how do we identify *these my brethren*? and (2) why utilize this principle of judgment? *These my brethren* must be someone present in the great judgment scene, indicated perhaps by a sweep of the King's hand. But who are they?

1. Some commentators assume that three groups are contemplated by the Lord: the sheep, the goats, and *these my brethren*. This trichotomy then forces them to identify each group somewhat as follows:
  - a. The sheep are fleshly Israel ("the lost sheep of the house of Israel"), the goats are unbelievers, and *these my brethren* are the harrassed Church of Christ.
  - b. *These my brethren* are Israel according to the flesh (Rom. 9:5), the sheep are the Church who had been kind to Jews in distress, while the goats are unbelievers who had not.
  - c. *These my brethren* are the elect of God, the Church of both

Testaments, while the sheep and goats become two different classes of people outside the pale of either covenant.

However, Jesus was not necessarily coining terminology for a tight eschatological system. He was speaking popularly to Hebrew listeners expected to understand Him. This tri-partite division leads to confusing and contradictory conclusions, hence the simpler solution is that of Jesus, the twofold division of humanity, the sheep and the goats (25:32f.).

2. The King's sweeping gesture toward *these my brethren even these least*, then, must include ANYONE of the entire human family who had need, whether Christian or not.
  - a. It can be validly argued that Jesus' true *brethren* are only those who do the will of His heavenly Father (12:46-50). Jesus said so, and that settles it.
  - b. On the other hand, our section began with Jesus' great Messianic title: "the Son of man" (25:31), which focuses attention on His authority to judge as well as on His true identity (Dan. 7:13f.; John 5:27). Even though He is THE Son of man par excellence, yet, by virtue of His human birth, HE IS BROTHER OF EVERY MAN WHO EVER LIVED. (See notes on 8:20.) From this point of view, then, there is no exclusiveness or pride in Jesus, because He is not ashamed to call even the worst sinner of the race "brother."

So, Plummer (*Matthew*, 351) was right to affirm that "Christ's claiming the poor and needy as His brethren is quite in keeping with His character as the Son of Man and the Son of God." His calling any man "brother" expresses His love for every human being to whom He willingly claims kinship. What psychologically powerful motivation He provides us in that act: by claiming kinship to everyone, whatever their need, He endears them to us! Anyone who is a brother of Jesus is a brother of mine to love and help just as He would! He urges, "*The least of these my brethren* are your brothers too."

How apply Jesus' words? By "doing good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10). Would our generous Master withhold His praise, should we show kindness to some unbeliever? Can the Savior of every man, who gave Himself without limit to win the heart of each, somehow not be sympathetic to the cry of the overlooked and despised who hurt, or fail to notice when any of His own people stops and stoops to lift the fallen and relieve their affliction, when the Heavenly Father does this every

day (5:45; Luke 6:27-36)?! So, when any believer helps anyone in the great family of man, God's promise to Abraham, "In you and in your children shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," finds surprisingly wider fulfillment (Gen. 22:18).

**Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me.** Why adopt this standard that sounds as if deeds alone are the determining factor in the salvation or loss of each man? Standing before a people for whom orthodox faith is paramount, why does Jesus emphasize deeds? Is it that faith in the correct doctrine is somehow less important than deeds? No, belief in the right teaching or hearty acceptance of the true revelations of God, is evident only in the life that acts in harmony with those revelations to express confidence in Him who told us what to believe. These deeds, then, reflect a person's attitude toward God, and are the acid test of his belief or unbelief (7:21; James 2:14ff.; I John 2:9ff.). Hence, the Lord will "render to everyone according to his deeds" (16:27; 10:32f.; Rom. 2:6ff.). Here is why:

1. There is absolutely no way anyone can serve God directly. He does not dwell in temples made by men nor is He served by men's hands (Acts 17:24f.). He does not use or need our gifts (Ps. 50:9-13). Our very materiality defeats our best efforts to do service to Him who is spirit (John 4:23f.). Therefore, some other way must be found, if man is to serve Him at all.
2. Therefore, God has chosen to send us His representatives to substitute for His royal Person: the needy, the ill, the alienated, *the least of these His brethren*. This is the finest test of our true character, because, were Jesus to appear on earth in His kingly glory, too many would hastily mask their true personality, show Him smiling deference, spare no pains to do Him honor and deny Him nothing. Were He to send the great, we would suppose that their importance gives value to our service or that we could later benefit from their position. Contrarily, *the least* are indicated, because they cannot repay. Serving them does not advance our position socially. (Cf. Luke 14:12-14.) The inclination to show them generosity would be practically nil in self-pleasing societies, but it would demonstrate our true character.
3. Hence, to serve people is to serve Jesus Christ. To abuse or persecute them, or simply to turn a deaf ear to their pleas, is to treat God in the same way. (An ancient concept: Deut. 15:7-11; Ps. 22:24; Prov. 19:17; 14:31; Eccl. 11:1f.; Isa. 63:9; Zech. 2:8; II Cor. 9:6-8;

- Heb. 6:10.) The richness of our generosity with people is the measure we give to God—even if it is service we render our earthly superiors (Col. 3:18—4:1; Eph. 5:21—6:9; Matt. 7:2; Luke 6:37f.).
4. Therefore, in Jesus' name we identify with others in their need (Heb. 13:3; Rom. 12:13, 15, 16, 20f.; II Cor. 8, 9; Eph. 4:28; 5:1, 2; Phil. 2:1-5; I Thess. 5:11-15).

In the final analysis, then, everyone will be rewarded on the basis of his similarity to the Judges (5:44-48; Luke 6:32-38). While our text intimates that our Lord will surprise the world by the startling basis on which the judgment of each turns, this verdict will harmonize perfectly with the moral sense, experience and judgments of the world as it estimates others, i.e. not merely on the basis of the opinions held, but especially on the basis of deeds and character. So, God utilizes our commonest standard of judgment to deal with everyone on that Last Day.

### ARE ALL GOOD PAGANS SAVED?

Alford (I,256) describes those, who are judged *righteous* here, as decent pagans:

(They) *know not* that all their deeds of love have been done *to and for Christ*—they are overwhelmed with the sight of the grace which has been working in and for them, and the glory which is now their blessed portion. . . . It is not the *works, as such*, but the *love* which prompted them—that love which *was their faith*,—which felt its way, though in darkness, to Him who is love, which is commended.

In a similar vein, Bruce (*Expositor's Greek Test*, 306) taught

The doctrine of this passage is that love is the essence of true religion and the ultimate test of character for all men Christian or non-Christian. *All* who truly love are implicit Christians. For such everywhere the kingdom is prepared. They are its true citizens and God is their Father.

Others might urge that, if God wants to save a person who never heard of Christ, but whose treatment of his fellows reveals that practical love to which God aimed in all His decrees, will not that pagan's unbaptism be considered baptism, his unconversion become conversion? After all, is not the very purpose of the Judeo-Christian

tradition to make men over in the likeness of God? Could not this purpose be achieved by someone who never heard about Jesus?

This thesis, however well expressed, is only hypothetically possible but not juridically probable nor sustained by the mainstream of Scripture. None has ever been good enough to be redeemed by his own mere goodness, even though it be goodness to his fellows (Rom. 3:10ff., 23). To affirm the contrary denies that God has consigned all men alike to the category of sin with its consequences (Rom. 3:9; 11:32; Gal. 3:22).

Now if God wishes to save pagans who never heard of Christ but simply on the basis of their "practical love which stands in the place of faith"—since they could never have any faith in a Jesus of whom they never heard (Rom. 10:14-17)—that is His business. He is Lord. Nevertheless, the only information He has revealed about His plans indelibly underlines the deadness, darkness and doom of those living outside the pale of the Judeo-Christian faith. The principle purpose of *Romans*, for instance, is to convince Jews that lost Gentiles can be saved on the same ground of faith as any Hebrew. Ephesians 2:2ff. describes the destiny of death programmed for the "disobedient . . . objects of wrath like the rest of mankind." Ephesians 2:11ff. sweepingly indicts the entire Gentile population of earth as "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel . . . *having no hope and without God* in the world." Ephesians 4:17-19 categorically declares that Gentiles live "in the futility of their minds . . . darkened in their understanding, *alienated from the life of God* because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardening of their heart." Peter too condemns as "former ignorance" and "futile" the traditions of one's tribe or race as something from which men must be redeemed (I Peter 1:14, 18; 4:3f.; cf. Col. 1:21). John announced that it is uniquely the Son of God who has come to give us understanding and the opportunity to know Him who is true, the true God and eternal life, while all the rest are idols (I John 5:20f.). Can anyone, Jew or Gentile, be saved in his idolatry? "He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life" (I John 5:12). Will our covenant-keeping God act inconsistently with these revelations of His own intentions?

### The Opposite Verdict

**25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the**

**devil and his angels.** Jesus unflinchingly reveals the following characteristics of this punishment:

1. The punishment of the wicked is no blessing, but a curse, suited to those *cursed* by God. This filthy place of horror, desolation and death all over again is a place where God's patient love and forgiveness is not. (Rev. 20:14f.; II Thess. 1:9 "exclusion from the presence of the Lord.")
2. Their chastisement separates them from Jesus: *Depart!* (cf. 7:23; 25:46; Luke 13:27f.; cf. "outside": 8:11f.; 22:13; 25:10ff., 30; Rev. 22:15). This deprives them of all the joy of His presence.
3. Their penalty involves being cast *into the eternal fire*. Some question the eternality of hell on the assumption that the wicked shall be tormented so many years and then extinguished by annihilation. But since *the devil and his angels*, the beast and the false prophet will be tormented "day and night for ever and ever," (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14f.) it is no surprise that those demons and men who follow Satan should share his fate (8:29; Mark 1:24; Luke 8:31; Rev. 20:14f.; 14:9-11). Such a prospect offers little hope for a merciful reprieve through later annihilation.

Further, this unquenchable fire is *eternal fire*, because it is *prepared*, hence, not necessarily like any other fire known to man. Consequently, it is not subject to the logical deductions that some base on scientific knowledge of elements in our present universe. If the Lord Himself provides the fire, who can debate its reality or character, if He terms it "unquenchable" or *eternal*? (Cf. Isa. 33:14; 66:24; Matt. 3:10-12; Mark 9:43-48; Jude 7; Rev. 20:10, 14f.; cf. 19:20; 21:8.) Such fire, then, must be worse than all our present experiences of literal, earthly fire. (Cf. Deut. 32:22; Ps. 11:6; 18:8; 21:9; 97:3; 140:10; Jer. 4:4; Nah. 1:6; Mal. 3:2; 4:1.) On *eternal*, see 25:46. Sodom's fate is but a grim preview (Jude 7, NIV).

4. Their punishment is *prepared for the devil and his angels*, a fact with two ramifications:
  - a. Hell is no afterthought for God. Satan's revolt did not catch God unprepared to deal with his rebellion. God is prepared either way. For those who share His holiness, He prepared a realm of eternal happiness. For those who share Satan's proud, rebellious spirit, He has ready a place of unending punishment (13:41f., 49f.; 18:8f.; Luke 16:19-31; Jude 7).

- b. Hell was not originally planned for man whose high destiny was established at his creation "to rule over all the works of (God's) hands" (Ps. 8). But when man determined not to realize the glorious purpose for which God created him, he damned himself to spend eternity with those who likewise rebelled against the benign purpose of God.

### The Justice of the Sentence

25:42 For I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink; 43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not (Heb. 13:16). Why should it be true that, regardless of all other considerations, the sin of neglecting to bless the needy with required refreshment is sufficient to justify an eternity of punishment? Because one's indifference to people proves how he understands grace and shows that, in his view, when anyone is in need of mercy, it should not be granted (James 1:22; 4:17; Luke 12:47). So, none is granted to him (5:7; 18:32f.). Lack of positive, out-going love that actively ministers to people is the denial of all that is fundamental in religion (22:34-40). God's love simply does not dwell in the selfish (I John 3:17). God feels responsible for the unfortunate, and acts accordingly. There can be no praise for an inactive orthodoxy (James 2:14-26).

But why did Jesus not mention those other sins that men consider far more heinous, as the basis of His unquestionably right verdict? Surely murder, adultery and idolatry are still sins, still culpable . . . ? His piercing analysis here intends to reveal the terrible criminality of what are only apparently the least of sins. He does this for two reasons. By condemning the "unimportant" sins, He simultaneously pronounces His judgment convincingly against all others thought far more serious. (See note on 25:30.) Further, by condemning this indifference to our fellows which is expressed in these petty omissions, He attacks the selfishness behind all the "more important" sins. Again, He condemns what men's attitude toward Him would have been, had He personally approached them in the guise of their needy fellowman. It is as if they had said "no" to Jesus Christ in every single situation. Should they not be rejected for this? Can the Lord welcome the uncompassionate?

### The Self-righteous Rebuttal

25:44 **Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?** Their ignorance of any contact with Jesus is precisely like that of the godly, since neither group actually saw the Son of God Himself. Nevertheless, although the form of their surprised question is identical to that of the righteous, it is motivated by self-deception. They suppose that they would have been hospitable, had they actually met Him. So, in their self-justification, the ungodly haughtily challenge the King to name the time and place where they were faced with the opportunity to serve Him and failed to do so. Their self-deceived argument is, "Had we been granted the privilege to serve you, we would have been more than glad to do so. But we never met anyone that even closely resembled you—just miserable wretches whom it was useless to befriend, a shabby old woman, a waif too skinny to adopt,—all situations too trifling to take seriously, you understand."

### The King's Defense

25:45 **Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me.** Just how closely Jesus identified with His suffering people is illustrated by His charge that Saul of Tarsus, by persecuting the Church, had attacked Him personally (Acts 9:4f.). Further, how closely Jesus identifies with the entire human race, despite its sinful unbelief, culpable ignorance and moral hardening, is indicated by His concern that men who never heard one Gospel sermon, be fully human and humane. But they fail even this rudimentary test. Their wisdom is futile, their understanding darkened. Separated from the life of God because of their ignorance which is due to spiritual self-hardening and having lost all sensitivity, they plunge into every other form of indulgence, ever greedy for more (Eph. 4:17ff.). Thus, they become less than human, like unreasoning animals (Jude 10). To be fully human means to glorify God as God and treat His creatures accordingly. (Contrast Rom. 1:18-32.)

d. The results of the judgment  
will be permanent (25:46)

25:46 **And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life.** Some insist that Bible texts are rare that

assert the eternity of God's punishment of the damned. Granted, but HOW MANY TIMES DOES JESUS HAVE TO SAY A THING FOR IT TO BE TRUE? When correctly interpreted, just once is sufficient. Linguistically, the punishment of the rejected will endure as long as the joyous happiness of the saved, for the word, *eternal*, is the same used to define both (*kòlasin aiònion . . . zòèn aiònion*). Nothing could be less defensible that to affirm that *eternal punishment* must be of shorter duration than *eternal life*. The larger Biblical context describes the wicked's sentence of punishment as endless. (See notes on 10:28; 18:8; 3:12; 25:41; cf. Isa. 33:14; 66:24; Jude 7, 13; Rev. 14:11; 20:10.)

Contrary to the supposition that truly *eternal* punishment must imply some kind of everlasting life for the wicked, it is more exact to say that the Scriptures "eternalize all human spirits," whether good or bad, saved or damned.

1. At death the spirit returns to God (Eccl. 3:21; 12:7). If man's breath alone were intended, what is there to commit to God (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59)?
2. Therefore, the wicked dead as spirits are now alive and undergoing punishment (Luke 20:38; 16:19-31; I Peter 3:19; II Peter 2:9). Christians, too, survive death and are alive with the Lord before the resurrection. (See notes on 22:32, 33; cf. II Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23.) The death of the body is not equal to the death of the spirit, because all men, apart from the resurrection, survive their separation from the body (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4f.; 23:43; I Cor. 15:18; Rev. 6:9ff.; 7:9?).
3. That the "second death" (Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8) does not imply annihilation is proven by its Biblical definition as "the lake of fire." So, whatever is affirmed of the fire is true also of "the second death." Further, as its name implies, it is death all over again for the wicked dead who were resurrected to face judgment. But, since the first death, which is the basis of the comparison, was not the end of man, since he survives the separation from the body in physical death, "the second death" clearly cannot imply annihilation. It implies but the separation, not from the continuation of God's goodness during earth-life, but from the eternal blessedness of His goodness during the next life.

Jesus considered *eternal life* and *eternal punishment* as proper antitheses. However, the quality of *life* He means cannot be bare existence, for

which non-existence would be the true opposite. Rather, His *life* connotes an existence enriched by abundant joy, peace and reigning (John 10:10; Rom. 5:17). *Punishment*, its true opposite, connotes an existence marred by unending misery. While eternal existence marks each destiny, how completely different is their quality!

Further, how could *punishment* be *eternal*, as Jesus says, if the punished were somehow annihilated before the termination of that suffering which He Himself declares shall be as *eternal* as the life of the blessed? In such a case, *eternal punishment* would be a contradiction in terms. But, because it is not, may it not be concluded that the punished are as *eternal* as the *punishment* for which they are destined?

That *eternal punishment* is neither unjust nor unworthy of God, is evidenced by the unexpected appropriateness of God's permitting the righteous and the wicked to realize their last dream, that goal to which their whole moral life tended. Is it not evidence of God's final mercy to all that each is granted the unchangeable privilege of loving or hating Him forever, of living with Him or apart from Him forever? The impenitent continue to insist until, at last, because they will not accept what God offers, the Judgment grants them what they desired. But to their endless chagrin, they discover too late that their desires were self-destructive and horribly mistaken. So, because they shall have eternally what they desired, it shall be *eternal punishment*. Consequently, God would be giving sinners what they had always wanted, they would be endlessly punished, and He would be perfectly just.

Therefore, is not the self-chosen misery of the wicked also appropriate? *Punishment* here implies that the pain caused is not spiteful brutality or purposeless cruelty on God's part, but rather a discipline imposed by the wise plan of a good God in harmony with the nature and needs of the impenitent themselves. Either they learn in this life to live *with* God and enjoy it, or they shall be granted the fearful privilege and awful responsibility of living *without* Him and of suffering all the eternal consequences their free choice entails.

But that God already considers their love so cold, their conscience so dead, their intellect so darkened and their will so hardened that none could ever desire to return to the hated Judge who sentenced them to eternal torment, is evidenced by the fact that the wicked dead are even now being punished (II Peter 2:9). The permanence of their isolation from the righteous is beyond dispute (Luke 16:26;

Matt. 13:41f., 49f.). Not one statement of Scripture suggests any possible future reversal of the judgments announced on the Last Day. "Today is the day of salvation! After this life there remains only judgment (Heb. 9:27; 10:26, 27).

Plummer (*Matthew*, 346) saw the incalculable risk and folly involved in wistfully hoping that *eternal punishment* does not mean just what it implies:

Although in the story of the five foolish virgins . . . we are told nothing as to the duration of the punishment for careless misconduct, we are told that it was inflicted, and that it was severe . . . meant banishment and untold gloom. And, even if, when it had done its work, the punishment ceased, yet the loss which it had involved was irreparable. Is it not the depth of folly to incur certain punishment, because it is not certain that the punishment shall last for ever?

But that it shall last forever is foreshadowed when Jesus called the wicked, *Cursed*. So saying, He signalled the termination of His, indeed all, intercession. Now, alone without any defender, they must stand before Him who longed to be their Intercessor, but who is now Lord and King, and He must put these enemies under His feet for ever. They have no hope, none to plead for them. They can only *go away into eternal punishment*.

**The righteous enter into eternal life.** (See on 25:21, 34.) Here is permanent success in what really counts. What perspective this final vision gives to our present, seemingly humdrum lives! Whatever the ordinariness or excitement of our present service, whatever the comparative greatness or insignificance of our achievements, the only true distinction of worth in the long-run is whether or not, in the esteemed judgment of Jesus Christ, we served Him through kind helpfulness to the least of His brethren. For with that judgment rests a joyous future with God that alone is worthy of the title, *eternal life*. What more appropriate, eternal dwelling could be imagined for those who are willing to associate with people of low position to lift, encourage and lead them (Rom. 12:13-16), than *eternal life* with God whose dwelling place is ever with him who is contrite and lowly in heart (Isa. 57:15; Matt. 5:3-12; Rev. 21:3; 22:1-5) and loves to bless too?!

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. List all the main features surrounding the Second Coming of Christ taught in this great prophetic discourse, whether in direct declaration,

indirect statement or illustration,

2. List all the features of the sheep and goats illustration that are parallel with details given in other parables.
3. What is the one main point of this illustration about the sheep and goats? Show what is really new in this story that was not taught in others.
4. According to Jesus, what is to be the criterion of judgment? What makes this standard so vital?
5. On what previous occasion(s) had Jesus clearly taught about His glorious coming with His angels to judge men according to their deeds? (Occasion and text.)
6. In what sense will "all nations be gathered before him"? Will they be judged as nations or as individuals?
7. Who are the "sheep" and who are the "goats" in Jesus' illustration?
8. What is meant by "inherit the kingdom"?
9. In what sense was "the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"?
10. Who are the "brethren" of Christ to whom practical help was to be given? Defend your answer.
11. What is meant by "eternal fire"? In what sense was it "prepared for the devil and his angels"?
12. Who or what is "the devil"? Who or what are "his angels"?
13. Define the following terms, using everything the Bible teaches on these subjects:
  - a. "eternal punishment" Does this imply unending existence, or a quality of existence?
  - b. "eternal life" Does this imply merely unending existence, or a quality thereof?
14. To what coming does our Lord allude in this parable? Prove your answer.
15. Explain what is meant by "the throne of His glory."
16. What does this section teach or imply about the character, nature and authority of Jesus?
17. What does this parable reveal about the purpose of a final judgment?

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

### SECTION 61

#### JESUS PREDICTS HIS OWN DEATH A FIFTH TIME

TEXT: 26:1, 2

1 and it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these words, he said unto his disciples, 2 Ye know that after two days the passover cometh, and the Son of man is delivered up to be crucified.

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose Jesus thought it essential for the disciples' growth and even their sanity to repeat His death prediction one more time?
- b. Why do you think Jesus thought it essential that they hear it at this particular time in His ministry?
- c. Do you see any particular connection between Jesus' usual way of expressing His death prediction and the noteworthy addition made on this occasion: "You know that after two days the passover is coming"?
- d. If you see the connection suggested in the previous question, how does this connection reveal the greater plan of God behind the two events?
- e. Who do you suppose is going to "deliver up (the Son of man) to be crucified"? (1) Judas? (2) the Jewish authorities? (3) Pilate and the Romans? (4) God? On what basis do you choose or reject any of the above?
- f. Since this death announcement comes on the heels of "all these words" which Matthew records contextually in chapters 23-25 as almost one continuous discourse, how does this death announcement fit into all that Jesus has been saying?
- g. If Judas heard this announcement, what effect do you think this sinister warning had on him?

#### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

When Jesus had finished His prophetic discourse, He commented to His disciples, "As you know, the Passover is the day after tomorrow, and I the Son of man, will be handed over to be executed on a cross."

## SUMMARY

Once again Jesus hammered home the unwelcome truth that He would be crucified, this time, however, specifying that this would occur during the Passover festival.

## NOTES

## 1. AFTER THE DISCOURSE

26:1 **And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these words he said unto his disciples.** Matthew deliberately indicates that the foregoing speech of Jesus is to be considered one continuous discourse, not a collage of bits and pieces taken from heterogenous sources and now compiled into one fabricated homily. While it is remarkable that Matthew repeatedly used the same formula (*kaì egéneto hòte etélesen ho Iesoûs tous lôgous toutous*), on what reasonable basis can any critic deny this excellent writer the right to make use of whatever connectives HE considers appropriate?

Because *all these words* refers contextually to the great Eschatological Discourse (chaps. 24, 25) and possibly also to the anti-Pharisean sermon (chap. 23), two important ends are achieved:

1. Because, in Matthew's outline, no more landmark sermons follow this remark, some deduce that our author speaks of the conclusion of Jesus' great public or semi-public discourses. However, the great valedictory speeches at the last Passover supper occur after this. (Cf. John 14-17.) So, Matthew does not add *all* to imply that Jesus' teaching is absolutely completed with no more to say to anyone, but simply that the foregoing lessons on chapters 23-25 are the background in which to understand what follows next.
2. Fully aware of the emotional impact His presentation of His own future glory must make on His yet immature disciples, Jesus must bring them back down to earth. With future glories ringing in their ears, resurrecting old wrong-headed Messianic concepts, they needed to be especially warned once again of His impending suffering, in order to be emotionally ready for what was coming.

## 2. APPROACH TO DEATH

26:2 **Ye know that after two days the passover cometh, and the Son of man is delivered up to be crucified.** The disciples are reminded of two great facts:

1. *After two days the passover cometh.* As Jesus often spoke of time this means "in a couple of days" or even "day after tomorrow," which counts the day on which the predicted event is to occur. (See on 12:40; 16:21; 17:23; 20:19 where Mark and Luke's parallel consistently say "on the third day" for Matthew's "after three days.") Despite what seems to us an imprecision on Jesus' part, He is not inaccurate. In fact, Matthew gives circumstantial evidence agreeing with the other Evangelists. John dated the arrival of Jesus at Jerusalem as "six days before the passover" (John 12:1) i.e. the day before the Messianic Entry (John 12:12). Beginning with the day after their arrival at Bethany, Mark incidentally lists the following five days as they occur:

1. Day 1, the triumphal entry (John 12:12; Mark 11:11)
2. Day 2, the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:12)
3. Day 3, the fig tree was noticed as withered (Mark 11:20)
4. Day 4, at the conclusion of the great day of debates, discussions and discourses, "it was not two days before the Passover" (Mark 14:1; cf. Matt. 26:2)
5. Adding these two days, the count tallies with that of John at five; or six including the arrival at Bethany.

Thus, Matthew's citation harmonizes with that of Mark and John too.

*The passover comes* on the 14th day of the month Abib or Nisan corresponding to our March-April. (Cf. Exod. 12; Lev. 23:4ff.; Deut. 16:1ff.; see notes on Matt. 26:17ff.) Since Jesus ate the Passover on Thursday night and was crucified on Friday (27:62; cf. John 19:31; Mark 15:42), this prophecy was pronounced late on Tuesday evening, 12 Nisan (Wednesday already begun). So, the *two days* are from Tuesday evening to Thursday evening.

2. *The Son of man is delivered up to be crucified.* His purpose was not simply to glance at the calendar, but to draw some internal connection between the Passover and His own death.
  - a. The connection is not that the crucifixion and the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb must strictly coincide at the same hour, since Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples. (See on 26:17ff.; cf. Luke 22:15.) That He died on the day following the lamb's sacrifice changes nothing, since His death occurred on the same day the Passover was eaten, i.e. on 15 Nisan which began at sunset on the 14th with the Passover meal. Rather, this solemn declaration draws a parallel between the two sacrifices as to their meaning and purpose.

- b. The present tense, *the Son of man is delivered up (paradidotai)*, need not refer to Judas' plot as already boiling in his heart. Rather, Jesus speaks with such confidence regarding the future fact, that He uses this vivid, realistic present in the place of the future tense. (Cf. Blass-Debrunner, § 323.) His prophetic confidence is not unexpected, because it arises out of God's set purpose and foreknowledge which handed Jesus over (*paradidotai*) to wicked men for crucifixion (Acts 2:23). Even here, sinful men must unwittingly cooperate with the eternal purpose of God! Even so, unless God hand Him over to be sacrificed, sinners could not touch Him (26:53).

The *you know* which governs the first clause, introduces also the second: "*You know* not only that the Passover is coming, but also that I have warned you for months that I must die. Now you must connect the two." He had gradually led them to this knowledge by hints (John 2:19ff.; 3:14; 6:51; 10:11, 15; Matt. 9:15; 10:38; 12:40; 21:38), but also openly and unmistakably (16:21; 17:12, 22f.; 20:17ff.). In this fifth, final prediction recorded in Matthew, there is the repeated certainty that the Romans would be the executioners, since crucifixion was not the usual Jewish method of capital punishment. The new element is the determination that He would die at this Passover.

Whereas His death will be decided by the Sanhedrin and executed by the Romans, Jesus is perfectly aware of what His foes are plotting. Dignified and majestic, He approaches His death with intelligent purpose and mastery, even defining the final hour Himself. The leaders would decide it must occur "not during the feast." But it is Jesus who definitely fixed the precise day as during the feast. This point is made clearer in the following section (26:3ff.). What took place on Golgotha that Passover was no freak accident in the vicissitudes of irrelevant history. But the realization of the eternal, predetermined plan of God! (Cf. Ps. 33:10f.; cf. 2:4; Prov. 19:21; Eph. 1:3-14; I Peter 1:19ff.)

Bruce (*Training*, 289) grasped the high appropriateness of Matthew's introduction to the Passion history, composed of four elements:

1. Jesus' prediction of His imminent crucifixion (26:1f.).
2. His enemies' consultation on how His elimination must be achieved (26:3ff.).
3. Mary's anointing His body for burial and further motivation of Judas' betrayal (26:6-13).

## 4. Judas' offer to betray Jesus to the authorities (26:14ff.).

In these four segments, Matthew puts together divine certainty, human audacity, deep love and unutterable duplicity. The program of God is pitted against human plotting. Baseness and hatred are contrasted with honest, deeply-felt love. Discipleship, for all its weakness and failure, is supremely treasured by God above all unbelieving scholarship and disenchanting cunning.

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what context did Jesus predict His death this time?
2. What specific teaching had Jesus just completed before making this announcement of His impending death?
3. On what day of the Hebrew calendar does the Passover occur? Therefore, on what day did Jesus pronounce this prophecy of His suffering?
4. How often had Jesus predicted His death to His followers before this? On what occasions?
5. Does the expression, "after two days," mean "on the third," "on the second day" or what? Give Bible evidence to support your answer.
6. What facts indicate that Judas had not already agreed with the authorities to betray Jesus?

## SECTION 62

## JESUS IS PLOTTED AGAINST BY THE RULERS

TEXT: 26:3-5

3 Then were gathered together the chief priests, and the elders of the people, unto the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas; 4 and they took counsel together that they might take Jesus by subtlety, and kill him. 5 But they said, Not during the feast, lest a tumult arise among the people.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. The Gospels recount numerous clashes between Jesus and the authorities before this Last Week. What are the immediate causes

of this present plotting, those elements which had not been so much factor prior to this Last Week?

- b. Why do you think they assembled in the high priest's court, rather than in the regular meeting place of the Sanhedrin?
- c. Why do you think they concluded that they must take Jesus by subtlety? Was guile or deceit the stated purpose of this august body of religious leaders?
- d. Why did these, the highest authorities in the nation, fear the people so? Were their fears justified?
- e. Their final conclusion to postpone Jesus' assassination until after the feast clashes with Jesus' private pronouncement concerning that event. What does this fact reveal about them? about Jesus?
- f. Why do you think Matthew put these two conflicting decisions together here in one context?
- g. If you were the highest religious authority among your people and thought you must deal with a blaspheming, rebellious teacher and false prophet worthy of death, what would you do? Would you brave the wrath of the nation in the name of righteousness in your pursuit of God's honor, or would you cower and plot, as do these? Are you sure? What does this problem tell you about the leaders? and about yourself?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The Passover celebration was not only two days away, the feast when the Jews eat bread without any yeast in it. The clergy, the theologians and the judicial rulers of the nation assembled at the residence of the high priest, Caiaphas. There they plotted together, looking for some cunning plan whereby they could ensnare Jesus and dispose of Him. Because they were afraid of the people, they kept saying, "Not during the Passover Feast, or the people may riot!"

### SUMMARY

The same day that Jesus predicted His own death at the Passover, the nation's rulers assembled to discuss the plan which would make His words reality. Contrary to His prediction, they determined it must not happen during the feast or even publicly.

## NOTES

## 1. THE ALLIANCE OF THE DESPERATE

26:3 Then were gathered together the chief priests, and the elders of the people, unto the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas. Then, i.e. two days before the Passover (Mark 14:1). That Matthew does not mean "next in order, after the foregoing prediction," but "at the time just alluded to," is easily inferred also from Jesus' notice of the time (26:2). If so, at about the same time He prophesied that the supreme authorities of Israel would crucify Him during the Passover, they themselves were debating to put off their attempts until after the festivities. This timing is the more psychologically probable, if their fruitless sallies against Jesus and His exposures of their ignorance and hypocrisy occurred this same day, driving this resentful, embittered leadership to regroup to plot strategy.

How many previous consultations had been held to plot the demolition of the Nazarene's popularity? The opposition that now exploded as an obsession to kill Jesus had begun very early (John 5:16ff.; Matt. 12:14; John 7:1, 19, 25, 30ff.; 8:37, 40, 59; 10:31f., 39). But these sporadic, flailing attempts had aborted. The spectacular resurrection of Lazarus right under the nose of the leaders had gained new followers for Jesus (John 11:45). This daring miracle spurred the shaken authorities to instant action to combine forces in a concentrated, cooperative drive to stop the Galilean Prophet (John 11:47-54). Out of that plenary session of the Sanhedrin (*sunégagon . . . sunédrión*) came the determination to make Jesus a political scapegoat by death. From then on Jesus became a hunted man (John 11:57). But even so, no one came forward with interesting intelligence data, because Jesus was adroitly avoiding population centers by moving in out-of-the-way places like Ephraim (John 11:54) or travelling in the company of His admirers. This rendered secret capture impossible (Matt. 19:1f.; 20:29; John 12:19). So, because the prior conciliar decision had not procured the Galilean's elimination, and because He continued to wound the collective pride of the nation's leaders (see on 26:4), a fresh consultation must be held to establish which strategy would lead infallibly to decisive success.

This private conclave is composed of *the chief priests*, of official clergy, "the scribes" (Mark 14:1; Luke 22:2) or theologians, *and the elders of the people*, or national senate of Israel. *The chief priests* are not only the high priest actually in office as well as those who had

been dismissed from office by the political rulers, but also those priests in charge of the Temple administration in its various services. Together, these formed a priestly aristocracy quite distinct from their brethren, the common priests. Despite their political dismissal, these former high priests continued to exercise considerable influence, even if informally. (Consider the implications of Acts 4:6; 23:5 in the light of John 11:49, 51.) Modern attempts to free the orthodox Pharisees and *elders of the people* from guilt fail to prove these plotters were only Sadducean priests and their lackeys. (Cf. Flusser, *Jesus*, 85, 159ff.) The silence of the Gospel Passion narratives *in itself* proves nothing about Pharisean participation in the Passover plot, because they omit all mention of the Sadducees too. Each group is presented not under its party label, but in the person of those men whose official function as priests or scribes gave them this platform from which to attack Jesus officially. From this consultation on, then, party loyalties no longer count; just the final goal. Hence, the Gospel writers accurately picture Jesus' opposition as one united front composed of every section of their national religious and political leadership. (Cf. the apostolic preaching, Acts 3:17; 4:5, 8, 23; 5:21; 13:27.)

The theory that the godly Pharisees in the Jewish Senate disapproved of the Sadducean priesthood's political betrayal of Jesus to the Romans cannot be sustained by appeal to the silence of the Synoptics. It is said that the Evangelists could not credibly report the Pharisean protest against the Sadducees without appearing self-contradictory, since they desired to give an anti-Pharisean flavor to their pre-Passion stories (Flusser, *Jesus*, 85). The better hypothesis is that no concerted protest of the Pharisees ever rose to defend Jesus. What were the Pharisees doing in the arresting party in Gethsemane: protecting Jesus by reading Him His rights to a fair trial and warning him against self-incrimination (John 18:3)?! And, if they were alerted for the arrest, did they abandon their duty during the trials, if in fact they were pro-Jesus? And how explain the strange reappearance of the Pharisees to insure the tomb against imposture, if they had supposedly abandoned the Sanhedrin which brought about a victory for them (27:62)?

Granted, not all scribes are Pharisees nor are all Pharisees scribes. (Cf. Mark 2:16.) However, since the Pharisees had been ousted from

political power by John Hyrcanus (*Ant.* XIII,10,5-7) and Alexander Jannaeus (*ibid.*, 13,5), they utilized the scribe's role as interpreters of the Law to qualify themselves for positions of influence because of their accurate knowledge of tradition and its importance in legal interpretation. As opposed to the priesthood which was virtually, but not totally, closed to Pharisees (cf. Josephus, *Life*, §39), the Sanhedrin offered opportunities to implement their viewpoints at the highest level, whereinsofar their influence could command a majority of the elders that composed it. (See Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*, Introduction. Cf. note at 8:19.) Thus, the combination, *chief priests and the elders of the people* along with the scribes (Mark 14:1; Luke 22:2) combines the units that comprised the Sanhedrin.

Their gathering *together into the court of the high priest*, rather than in the Sanhedrin's usually assembly hall ("of hewn stone") may have several explanations:

1. Was this a night meeting at the close of their long day of disastrous debate with Jesus? Perhaps no night meeting of this sort could be held in the Temple.
2. This closed session emphasizes the selective nature of this assembly, as if the question of the Galilean Prophet could not be suitably handled in an open forum. Would such councilors as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea have been welcome or even informed of this scheming, if suspected of bias toward Jesus? (Cf. John 3:1; 7:50ff.; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50f.)
3. Perhaps even non-members of the Sanhedrin, whose astuteness could be pressed into service to promote the success of the conspiracy, could more easily be brought into the plot, if held outside the Sanhedrin's hall.

*The court of the high priest (tèn aulèn toû archieréos)* is the identical place where Peter denied Jesus, being the courtyard within which the men awaiting the outcome of Jesus trials had built a fire (John 18:15). The courtyard itself is surrounded by the buildings of the palace proper. It would appear from the denial accounts that both Annas, the old patriarch among the chief priests, and Caiaphas, his son-in-law and high priest then in office, lived in different apartments in this same palace complex. (Cf. John 18:13, 24 and notes on Matt. 26:57.)

Because *aulè*, by extension, seems to refer to the entire palace in some contexts (cf. Mark 15:16 - pretorium; perhaps also Luke

11:21; 1 Macc. 11:46), some argue that this insidious plot occurred, not where servants could overhear in an open courtyard, but in some large room of the high priest's apartment, as if he were a king in his "court." (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 120f.; Rocci, 302.) Besides the lack of evidence that *aulè* refers to the house itself (cf. Moulton-Milligan, 92), may it not be assumed that the chief priests, Annas and Caiaphas, would have servants like their masters, of if not, could order them to leave during the deliberations, thus actually insuring their privacy?

So it was to Joseph *Caiaphas* they came. (Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XVIII, 2,2; 4:3.) This past master of Roman-Jewish diplomacy succeeded in retaining his office from 18-36 A.D. in an epoch when the high-priesthood was almost a yearly turnover, having become the unfortunate victim of Herodian politics continued by Rome. (Josephus [*Ant.* XX,10,1] counts 28 high-priests in 107 years, an average of 3.8 years for a function that should have been for life!)

## 2. THE ATROCITY DETERMINED

26:4 and they took counsel together that they might take Jesus by subtlety, and kill him. All their sectarian differences and private animosities are sublimated by their shared, intense bitterness that goads them to recognize and destroy their common enemy. What recent events demanded this urgent plotting? Had not Jesus encountered opposition from these same leaders before? Why so brutal and why *now*?

1. They were genuinely alarmed at their losses sustained after Jesus raised Lazarus (John 12:10f., 19).
2. They were envious of His wide popular acceptance witnessed in His Messianic Entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11; esp. Luke 19:39f.; John 12:19).
3. The priesthood was especially stung by His furious denunciations of their Temple monopoly (21:12-17).
4. They launched futile attacks against Him only to find themselves publicly humiliated, exposed as incompetents and unable to defend themselves against His incisive brilliance and devastating accusations (21:23—22:46).
5. They stood defenseless before His scathing exposè of their hypocrisy (23:1-39).

6. Perhaps their greatest, most fundamental motivation is their unwillingness to repent. Rather than turn to Him, they turn on Him. Resentment, not repentance, is their reaction.

This assembly is not gathered to decide *what* should be done about Jesus, because this is already a foregone conclusion. Rather, their unscrupulous pondering is to determine *how* (*tò pòs*, Luke 22:2) He could be eliminated most certainly and quietly. Jesus' judicial murder is premeditated.

They determine to act *by subtlety* (*en dòlo*). This contrasts with the public police arrest they had attempted earlier without success (John 7:32, 45ff.). Because *subtlety* has the flavor of deceit, cunning and treachery, it suggests that the leaders of the nation deliberately abandoned all conscience to seek out unashamedly deceitful means to trap Jesus. But this expression may not at all represent what those rulers thought they were doing. Rather, they were seeking some stratagem, some cunning plan, to arrest Jesus which would not compromise their public image or cripple their authority. From their point of view, they were working on strategy. They probably argued, "This must be done *discretely*." Jesus later exposed their underhandedness to their face (Luke 22:52f.; John 18:20ff.).

### 3. THE ATTACK DELAYED

26:5 **But they said, Not during the feast, lest a tumult arise among the people. But they said** (*èlegon dè*, better: "they kept saying") graphically pictures a nervousness that firmly insisted on postponement. This verb stands out in elegant contrast to Jesus' prophecy (26:2). All urgency implied in their dedication and determination to destroy the Nazarene, must be subordinated to this prime consideration.

*Not during the feast* means not during the seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread that began with the Passover proper but continued another week. Originally two separate feasts, these naturally came to be treated as one, since anyone who came for the one must remain for the other. The celebration of national liberation from bondage naturally lent itself to stirring the patriotic spirit and potentially set the stage for nationalistic uprisings. That Jesus was Galilean, believed to be the long-awaited Messiah by those who came from Galilee, the hot-bed of liberationist terrorism, was reason enough for the authorities to conclude to wait another ten days before acting. That the feast

involved three days of solemn rest would not have stopped them, only calculating prudence.

*Lest a tumult arise among the people.* Their determination to postpone all action is based on several considerations:

1. Their chief danger does not lie with Jesus Himself. Apparently, something in His demeanor convinces them that He would not utilize His miraculous power in self-defense. Otherwise, would they have dared strike out at the unpredictable, awesome supernatural might He could bring to bear?
2. "His unjustified popularity with the crowds" constituted their principle preoccupation, because, during a feast attended by thousands of Jews from all over the world (cf. Acts 2:5-11), He would be surrounded by sympathetic Galilean supporters who hailed Him as their Messiah (Luke 21:37f.). Should the rulers make their move publicly, they risked open insurrection, if not civil war.
3. Consequently, the Jewish rulers had no doubt that an untimely insurrection would try the patience of the Roman authorities whose decisive reaction would reduce still further the already painfully minimal authority of the Sanhedrin (cf. John 11:48). In this tension we hear the cunning voice of Caiaphas repeatedly cautioning, lest his own careful diplomacy, that walked a long political tight-rope between Jewish loyalties and cooperation with Rome which gave him his high-priesthood, be wrecked by avoidable civil disorder and rioting.
4. The only factor that was not a consideration for their postponement was the high holiness of the feast. Had they thought that they could murder an innocent Man during the feast, nothing would have hindered them from so desecrating it, if they could but achieve their unholy purpose. They only fear that an insurgent, enraged populace would impede the plot. These rulers knew their people and had good reason for caution, because of all the tumults and seditious precedents they could have cited. (Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XX,5,3 = *Wars* II,12,1.4; the Passover tragedy under Archelaus, *Ant.* XVIII, 9,3; 10, 2.9.)

But this careful deliberation was to come to nothing because of the unsuspected presence of a traitor in Jesus' own following. Rather than follow their own carefully chosen counsel of caution, their burning desire for vengeance overpowered their reason. The stupidity of Satan defeated him: too quickly he moved his pawn, Judas, into

conjunction with the religious and political hierarchy, forcing him to sacrifice caution for temporary advantage and risk long-term failure. Notwithstanding Caiaphas' worries and the council's precautions, they were all forced to deal with Jesus *publicly at the feast*. These high councilors are an integral part of a higher plan of which they have no knowledge. Earlier, when they wanted to capture Jesus, He could not be touched. Now when they are unwilling to do it, because of personal considerations, He decided it against their will—and won. Further, despite the fact that they were forced to kill Jesus during the Passover, no one rioted. Literally everyone miscalculated Jesus' voluntary submission to death. This gauged just how seriously so many misunderstood the will of God, and how truly Jesus comprehended and obeyed it.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. On what day did the authorities assemble to plot Jesus' judicial murder?
2. Explain the various names used for the Jewish national feast: why do Mark and Luke call it "the Passover" and "the feast of Unleavened Bread"?
3. Is this plotting by the authorities the first of its kind, or had they done this before? If so, when?
4. List the Jewish national leaders that formed this consultation against Jesus. Explain the historic political or religious position of each group, showing their party's interest in silencing Jesus.
5. Where did this meeting occur? Who presided over the meeting?
6. Explain the authorities' fear of an uproar if Jesus were to be arrested during the feast.

### SECTION 63

#### JESUS IS ANOINTED BY MARY OF BETHANY

(Parallels: Mark 14:3-9; John 11:55—12:8)

TEXT: 26:6-13

6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 7 there came unto him a woman having an alabaster cruse of exceeding precious ointment, and she poured it upon his head, as he sat at

meat. 8 But when the disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? 9 For this *ointment* might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. 10 But Jesus perceiving it said unto them. Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. 11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. 12 For in that she poured this ointment upon my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. If Simon is really a leper, a ceremonially unclean outcast from Jewish society, how could it also be true that he possessed this house in Bethany, in which these guests are free to visit? If he were no longer a leper, why call him that?
- b. If the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany occurred several days earlier, before the Messianic Entry (John 12:1, 12) why then does Matthew delay recounting the event until now? Did he not know when it took place? Or does he have some other reason for registering these facts now out of their normal chronological order?
- c. If you assume that Matthew correctly placed this section here for good and appropriate reasons, what is the relationship between it and this new context in which he inserts it?
- d. How did Mary manage to anoint Jesus' head and feet, if He was eating at a table?
- e. How would you feel, if a good friend of yours came up to you at a dinner party and poured an 11:5 ounce bottle of strong perfume on your head and feet? What would others say? How should you treat this person? What of your dignity? How do you think Jesus answered these questions?
- f. Why do you think Mary chose such expensive ointment for this use?
- g. Why do you think the disciples were so indignant as to considering the anointing of Jesus a *waste*? What does this reveal about them? Even though John pictures Judas as instigating these complaints because he was greedy (John 12:6), how do you account for the other disciples' joining in to reproach Mary? Do you think their principle could ever be justified?

- h. Jesus said, "You always have the poor with you." Is He saying, "There shall always be the haves and the have-nots? Does He resign Himself to this reality? Then, should we do nothing about the poor?"
- i. Do you think Judas would really have used the money from the sale of the perfume in the way he indicated it should? What makes you think so?
- j. If, as Jesus affirmed, Mary anointed His body beforehand for burying, would not the perfume get a bit old, before the crucifixion actually took place? If six days were to pass before the burial, then how could her anointing Him "for burial" have anything to do with it?
- k. What is there about Mary's act that makes it so significant that one can hardly preach the Gospel without mentioning her memorial/memorable deed? Why did Jesus approve of her act so heartily.
- l. Do you think Mary anointed Jesus for the motive He attributed to her, i.e. specifically "to prepare [Him] for burial"? How could she have known about His approaching death and decide to anoint His body? And how could He know her real reason, without her announcing it publicly?
- m. How is the example of Mary supposed to teach us practically? Are we to go around anointing others? Is her noble deed merely a source of joy to us or are we to be strangely warmed by her love for Jesus, and love Him because she did, or what?
- n. How has Jesus' prophecy about Mary's memorial been fulfilled? Are you personally helping to fulfill His prediction? If so, how? If not, why not?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Earlier, six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, the town where Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead, lived. While there, they gave a dinner in His honor in the house of a man known as Simon "the leper." Martha waited at the table and Lazarus was one of those at the table with Jesus. As He was reclining at the table, Mary approached Him with a third-liter (about 12 oz.) alabaster flask of very expensive fragrant oil made of genuine nard. She broke open the jar and began pouring it over Jesus' head and anointing His feet. Then she wiped His feet with her hair. The fragrance of the

perfume filled the house. But there were some disciples, among whom Judas Iscariot (the one who was to betray Him), who, when they saw it, were indignant and grumbled to one another, "Why was this perfume wasted this way? Why, this ointment could have been sold for a fortune—more than a year's wages,—and donated to the poor!" and they sternly rebuked her. (Judas said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. Since he had charge of the common purse, he had the habit of pilfering the money put into it.)

But Jesus, noticing this, said to them, "You all let her alone! Why are you embarrassing the lady? For she has done a 'good work' to me. Judas, you let her observe it, anticipating the day of my burial. In fact, you will always have the poor people among you, and you can help them any time you want to. But I will not always be around for you to help. She has done what was in her power to do. By pouring this ointment on my body, she has anointed my body ahead of time for its burial. I can assure that what she has done will also be recounted in memory of her wherever in the whole world this Good News is preached!"

## SUMMARY

In a historical flashback the Gospel traces elements that not unlikely helped to crystallize Judas' decision to betray Jesus: Jesus did not permit anyone to criticize Mary's anointing as something less than perfectly appropriate under the circumstances. Further, Jesus continued what Judas must have considered to be negative talk about His own death in the not-too-distant future. Not only did Jesus praise Mary and her manifest faith in His testimony to His death and rebuke Judas in the process, but He promised her deed eternal fame as widespread as the Gospel proclamation.

## NOTES

### THE SETTING

**26:6** Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper. Neither Matthew nor Mark affirm exactly when the Lord was in Bethany. Rather, each introduces this episode with a circumstantial principle that derives its temporal value from its connection with the main verb of the sentence, "a woman came up." Only John furnishes the precise chronological data: "Six days before the Passover, Jesus

came to Bethany" (John 12:1). Therefore, whereas Matthew and Mark had been discussing events "two days before the Passover" (26:3; Mark 14:1), we conclude that they inserted the anointing in Bethany out of its normal chronological order so as to achieve an extraordinary, logical—or should we say, psychological?—connection between the anointing and its consequences. This procedure cannot be charged with contradiction, because neither writer asserts that this event occurred in any time sequence other than that indicated by John. (In fact, even John utilized this same technique in reverse with reference to the same events. [See John 11:2 and 12:1ff.]) If the Passover came on Thursday night that year (see on 26:17; cf. John 19:14, 31; Mark 15:42), then "six days before the Passover," dates the anointing in Bethany one evening before the Triumphal Entry. (See Hendriksen, *John*, II, 171ff. for fuller discussion of the date.)

So, what could have motivated Matthew and Mark to edit their material by inserting this event out of strict chronological order? In the loving anointing by Mary what is the connection they saw which qualifies this section's place appropriately between Jesus' prediction of His death (26:2) and the Sanhedrin's plotting (26:3ff.) on the one hand, and Judas' pact with the rulers (26:14ff.) on the other?

1. Their reason cannot be solely the venom rankling in the breast of Judas that drove him to betray Jesus, if the rebuke he received during the anointing be thought to be the only cause. In fact, neither Matthew nor Mark make this connection. They do not even mention the traitor by name. Only by reading John do we learn that it was Judas who led the complaining and something about his motives. But not even John draws the conclusion that Judas left the supper more decided than ever to betray the Lord. This is simply a conclusion based on a comparison of the three Gospels, none of which verifies our suspicion, even if they do not contradict it.

What took place at Bethany that night may have triggered the betrayal scheme already maturing in Judas' mind. Perhaps Jesus' rebuke is less a factor than His frank talk of His burial. This defeatism finally convinced the greedy Judas that his dreams of political power and personal wealth were finished, unless some urgent solution were found. In harmony with their own understanding of Jesus' betrayal and its causes, Matthew and Mark rightly connect Judas' determination with what occurred at this supper, for, say they, Iscariot walked away from this event determined to go to the priests (26:14).

2. Matthew sketches a magnificent contrast between what two of Jesus' disciples did about the predictions of His coming death (26:2; Mark omits this detail.).
  - a. Mary believed Him and anointed Him while she could (26:6-13).
  - b. Judas believed Him serious about His dark future, and so decided to make his own position as disciple bring him money one way or another by betrayal (26:14-16).
    - (1) If Jesus defended Himself by miraculous power against the crisis that forced Him to declare His Kingdom, honor His loyal supporters, in the end He would enrich Judas.
    - (2) Or, if Jesus chose to die, in which case the hoped-for declaration of the Kingdom must forever die with Him, Judas would have at least the betrayal payment for his trouble.
  - c. This contrast is between real belief among quite opposite types of disciple, and how their distinctive moral differences caused each to react. Matthew's reader is gently led to reflect on the question: what do I personally think about Jesus of Nazareth?
3. Matthew and Mark create, thus, a stark contrast between Mary's open-hearted love and the burning hatred and base plotting of the priests and Judas.

*Simon the leper*: nothing more is known of him beyond this supper given Jesus in his house. Because of so many Simons in Israel—there were even two more Simons at this table: Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot!—he was distinguished by his former disease, rather than by occupation (“Simon the tanner” Acts 10:6), by his skin complexion (Acts 13:1, Symeon Niger is “Simon Black”), by his father's name (“Simon Bar-jonah” Matt. 16:17) or by his politics (“Simon the Zealot” Acts 1:13). To call him *Simon the leper* reveals an insider's view of small-town life in first-century Palestine that a more formal identification of the man could not have achieved. Had Simon the leper been healed by Jesus? If so, his name is the unembarrassing living memorial to God's grace to him. Of course, he may have been deceased, his spacious house being now borrowed for this meal.

It is striking that John omits all mention of Simon the leper, directing all attention to Mary, Martha and Lazarus, whereas Matthew and Mark do not consider their names essential to the story. One tentative hypothesis is that, because of the more commodious size of Simon's house, the banquet was set there, rather than in that of Lazarus. Naming Lazarus was important for John, since he intended to indicate

Jesus' greater interest for the festal crowds as well as document how Lazarus' resurrection fired Jesus' enemies' animosity (John 12:9-11).

This incident must not be confused with the anointing of Jesus by a sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50). While both episodes are comprised of three identical elements, (1) the anointing by a woman at a meal in the house of a Simon, (2) the criticism of the woman by someone present, and (3) Jesus' defense of the woman, based on reading someone's thoughts, these incidents are not identical. (Cf. Foster, *The Final Week*, 25ff.) These motives conclusively distinguish them:

1. Luke's anointing occurred much earlier in Galilee during Jesus' ministry there; this anointing took place in Judea a few days before His death.
2. The Galilean Pharisee is a rude, ill-bred host, lacking the refinement to offer the usual amenities for his Guest's comfort, whereas everything at this supper sings of love for Jesus.
3. In Galilee the host launched no verbal attack, but merely judged the woman mentally, whereas Judas led other disciples in a verbalized criticism.
4. The bases of criticism varied: there, the propriety of Jesus' permitting a woman to touch Him; here, the propriety of a questionable use of needed funds.
5. In Galilee Jesus admonished the host; here, His disciples.
6. While the basic motive of both anointings is love, the Galilean woman did it in gratitude for forgiveness, but here Jesus underlines Mary's faith in His revelations: "for my burial."
7. In the Galilean anointing, the sins of the woman are made prominent and forgiven, but here Mary's character is only praised for its loving thoughtfulness and her grasp of Jesus' teaching, and made a universal example.

## 1. THE GENEROUS GIVING TO THE GODLY GUEST SPLENDID SELF-FORGETFULNESS

**26:7** There came unto him a woman having an alabaster cruse of exceeding precious ointment, and she poured it upon his head, as he sat at meat. Jesus revealed the Father to us as much by His table conversation as by His monumental mountain-top sermons. Many of the most profound things He ever taught were said while He was

eating with others. (Cf. John 2:1-11; Matt. 9:9-13; Luke 7:36-50; 14:1-24; Matt. 26:20-29; John 13-17; 21:12-23; Acts 1:4-8: "while He was eating with them.")

*There came unto him a woman.* But that this woman remained unidentified throughout the narrative of Matthew and Mark may indicate that the main point of this episode is not her friendship to Jesus which would express itself in a lavish love appropriate to this person, but the high importance of her purpose and the faith that prompted it. (See on 26:12.) That our author suppresses her name may also point to the early date of his writing:

1. To publish her name while she was still alive would expose this inhabitant of Bethany of Judah to the vindictiveness of those Jerusalem Jews who sought to repress the wildly spreading defections from Judaism to the movement of the Crucified One. John, writing after 70 A.D. could reveal her identity, because her enemies were defeated or dead.
2. Perhaps Matthew omits her name so as not to embarrass her, protecting her own modesty. Perhaps she was dead when John wrote, so naming her would cause no trouble to her.

The elegantly shaped *alabaster cruse* Mary brought was carved out of a translucent, usually whitish, fine-grained variety of gypsum stone. The use of such a vessel also points to its value, being the usual type of container for expensive aromatic oils (Pliny, *Natural History*, 13.3; 36.12; Herodotus 3.20.1). John (12:3) noted that this precious vase held one *litra* or 327.5 grams (about 11.5 oz.) of the costly essence. That Matthew called it *exceeding precious ointment* points to princely oriental luxury, a view externalized by the disciples' complaint.

*Having an alabaster cruse* does not mean she originally purchased this as one of several flasks of ointment to prepare her brother, Lazarus, for burial (John 11:17, 39). This supposition arises out of the disciples' complaint that, while the bottle retained its commercial value, she should have sold her possession. But its being merely a left-over contrasts with the spirit of initiative and creative preparation evident in her deed, and raises the question why it was not used on Lazarus originally. Did the sisters buy too much? It is simpler to admit that she simply spent the money for Jesus. Godet (*John*, II, 206f.) argues that Jesus' observations to the Pharisee in Galilee (Luke 7:44ff.) imply that the anointing of one's guest's head and washing his feet

were common services before a meal, and the omission of these amenities constituted a rude oversight. (Cf. Gen. 18:4; Judg. 19:21; I Sam. 25:41; Ps. 23:5; 92:10; 45:7? 141:5; John 13:5; I Tim. 5:10.) Hence, no one present would look askance as she began her task.

*She poured it upon his head as he sat at meat.* How harmonize this with John's affirmation that she anointed His feet (John 12:3)? Her doing both would not be difficult, if the guests were lying Roman-style on couches that radiate out from the central table. She simply approached Him, walking between the couches. Next she broke off the top (seal?) of the new long-necked vase to pour out its contents rapidly (Mark 14:3). Her original purpose was undoubtedly to anoint Jesus' head in the ordinary way. But observing that His feet were rough and travel-worn, she gladly poured the same perfume on them too as if her priceless essence were common water. To remove the excess, she used the only towel she had brought, her own hair. Since she came only to anoint His head, presumably she would have needed no towel. That it was against good breeding for a woman to present herself among men with her hair dishevelled does not testify against Mary's morals or argue for identification with the sinful woman of Luke 7:36ff.

1. Mary's hair may have been neatly bound up when she came in. Then, her need to dry Jesus' feet may have caused her to waive a minor scruple and undo her hair to meet the unforeseen need. It is perfectly in character with her carefully planned love offering to be only too glad to do this.
2. Her humility and irrepressible self-giving know no limit as she renders homage even to the least favored part of His body, drying *His feet with her hair*, her crown and glory. (Cf. I Cor. 11:15.) The generosity with which she poured so much perfume on His feet testified that no sacrifice was too costly. That she wiped them with her hair proved that no service was too demeaning for her. Any disciple worthy of the name must see that true adoration demands that we lay our honor at Jesus' feet in precisely the same way. Lenski (*John*, 840) preached: "The proper place for a disciple's head is at the Savior's feet." If John the Baptist considered himself unworthy to unloosen the sandals from Jesus' feet, why should not Mary react in a similar way?

## 2. THE GRACELESS GRUMBLING AT THE GOODNESS OF HER GIFT

26:8 **But when the disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?** They not only saw it; they also smelled the concentrated perfume, for "the house was filled with fragrance" (John 12:3)! Among Mary's critics, the voice of Judas is raised against the useless *waste* (*apòleia*, "destruction, loss"). But were it Matthew's exclusive purpose to insert this episode in this place to indicate one of Judas' motives for betraying Jesus, then *why did not Matthew at least name Judas* in his account? Why does he inculcate his fellow *disciples*, when, according to John, Judas was the main agitator?

Here is important evidence of independent eye-witness. John, from his own vantage point at the table, noticed that Judas instigated these remarks, whereas Matthew and Peter (Mark) remembered that others added their assent. While both versions are correct, complementing each other, their own independent testimony is confirmed even by this problem.

Two important considerations justify Matthew's procedure:

1. *The disciples* meekly followed Judas' lead. Perhaps because he had shown the courage to speak frankly despite the festive occasion, he did it directly in Jesus' presence, apparently arguing from right-minded principles. Our author does not name Judas, because his point may be that even other disciples are blindly led into this mistaken criticism. So their shamefully unthinking reaction is at least as noteworthy as naming the perpetrator.
2. *The disciples* did not follow Jesus' lead! This rash, uncharitable criticism was expressed in the presence of Jesus who could have pronounced far more competent judgment in the case and corrected any misdeed in Mary's conduct with the infallible certainty of divine judgment. His acquiescence in itself should have been justification enough for them not to join Judas' attack.

Judas' grumbling had enough truth and logic in it to convince and enflame deep emotion in the other disciples, moving them to indignation at this apparently inexcusable waste. Their attitude was a groan (*embrimàomai*), arising out of their displeasure (Mark 14:5). Is it not worthy of note when the godly are shaken from their steadfastness by a rogue disciple masquerading as a defender of the weak?

But *the disciples* who lamented the extravagance must be distinguished as two groups whose motives differed as to sincerity, even if both could make use of the same argument:

1. Judas' anger, says John (12:6), was driven by his greed. His rage is not faked, because he was really mad about losing money. Only his public reason is hypocritical. He felt personally cheated by her senseless throwing away good money that could have passed into his own grasp.
2. The *indignation* of the others, however, was motivated by their sense of stewardship, perhaps also by their own forced frugality over the last years of traveling with Jesus. (Cf. 8:19; John 6:12.) Those who have learned to control their own spending, often cannot tolerate to see others practice what the former consider "extravagance," even for the most justifiable reasons.

*To what purpose is this waste?* In Mary's deed they could discern only a lavish expenditure typical of conscienceless prodigality, quite uncharacteristic of godly people responsible for every penny God entrusts to them. But is *whatever* anyone spends for JESUS really squandered or lost? Great faith, judged by the external manifestations it motivates, may seem a waste, something extra or calculable only in terms of loss. But in terms of true stewardship, the objecting of Judas, and others like him, is exposed for the diabolical hypocrisy it was: he considered 300 denarii too much to spend for Jesus' luxury, but was willing to accept just under half that amount for Jesus' life (30 pieces of silver equals 120 denarii!)

#### Charity: the plausible argument of a short-sighted utilitarianism

**26:9 For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.** The disciples could quickly estimate the commercial value of the perfume on the following bases: The size of the container was a Roman pound (26:7). The container was alabaster, not ceramic. The aroma was identified to be that of an exquisite, oil-base perfume, "nard perhaps?" Its aroma filled the house, indicating its strength (John 12:3). The rapid mental calculation of the group's business-minded treasurer, Judas, settled the price at 300 denarii (Mark 14:5; John 12:5). Figured at a denarius

a day, a common day-laborer would have to work almost a year to earn wages enough just to pay for this perfume! So, is not her expensive perfume unquestionably an unjustifiable luxury in contrast to the crying needs of the poor who have no daily bread?!

The value of this perfume may not indicate anything about the affluence or prominence of Lazarus' family, because it could be Mary's personal sacrifice of her personal funds or life-time savings. By whatever method she earned it, she would have had to save 20 denarii a year for 15 working years to amass this sum by herself. Even if she were independently wealthy, this was still a large sum for her to pour out in one gift.

*This ointment . . . sold . . . given to the poor.* Judas marshalled the other disciples to criticize what they could not stop. By implication these disciples treat Mary as if she never felt any compassion for the poor. Were not the entire apostolic group and Jesus dependent on others' generosity sufficiently to qualify as *poor* (8:20; 27:55f.; Luke 8:2f.)? Had her family never hosted these very men, meeting their needs? While they were accustomed to *practical* hospitality, they were shocked by her *impractical* extravagance. Nevertheless, as they took up Judas' insincere position, the disciples' understanding of the problem involves alternatives that are not mutually exclusive: either love the poor or anoint Jesus. As Jesus will imply in His answer, one can legitimately dedicate himself to His worship as well as labor sacrificially for the liberation of the needy.

John, however, redimensioned Judas' slashing remark: "He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief" (John 12:6). As treasurer of the Lord's group, he received all contributions and was responsible for disbursing cash for purchases and gifts to the poor. (Cf. John 13:28ff.) But he pilfered funds held in trust. Is Farrar (*Life*, 496) correct to conclude that Judas formed this argument to blind himself to the baseness of his ruling passion? While certainly a hypocritical pretext, did he present himself as a champion of the poor to conceal even from himself the glaring wrongness of his greed? Lenski (*Matthew*, 1008) eloquently sketched the treacherousness of Judas' insinuations:

He condemns not only Mary but Jesus himself. Judas implies that Jesus is robbing the poor; that he is lavishing upon himself what rightfully belongs to charity; that for his own glorification he allows a waste that is utterly wrong; that his example is harmful to others; and that Judas is the man who knows what is right, proper, charitable, and is not afraid to mention it!

This was the sort of leadership the unthinking disciples were following! Even if they were moved by sincere concern for the poor and intended to pass judgment only on Mary, they unwittingly swung behind an attack on the Lord Himself!

### 3. HIS GALLANT GRATITUDE FOR HER GLADDENING GRACIOUSNESS

26:10 **But Jesus perceiving it said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.** Because Judas' sweeping innuendo implicates Jesus too, the Lord cannot defend Himself without appearing to condone wastefulness by accepting it. But to the surprise of everybody, He brilliantly defended Mary, while fairly weighing the truth of the disciples' position and in full awareness of the poor people all about Him.

*Why trouble ye the woman*, as if what she has done could somehow be defined "sinful"? Embarrassed and stunned, Mary alone could not convincingly turn back the accusation of wastefulness. Jesus proceeds to show that *she has wrought a good work upon me*. Several reasons may have prompted this approach:

1. IT WAS USEFUL SERVICE TO THE POOR. The Lord gently reveals the disciples' gross misconception by explaining that she was using what was in her power to do *a good work upon me*. Jesus, the poor ex-carpenter from Nazareth, was now without permanent housing and living on the very contributions of which Judas was the common treasurer. (Cf. Luke 8:12.) Edersheim (*Life*, II,360) remarked compellingly:

That He, Who was ever of the poor and with them, Who for our sakes became poor, that through His poverty we might be made rich, should have to plead for a last service of love to Himself, and for Mary, and as against a Judas, seems, indeed, the depth of self-abasement.

Hence He himself was one of the very poor to whom those of greater means should do good. This, says Jesus, *she has done*, fulfilling the very principle defended by the disciples. Because her purpose was to prepare His body for burial (26:12), then her goal and purpose must be judged useful, because specifically related to the exigencies of burial and its relative costs. For the actual

burial Nicodemus brought 100 times the weight of Mary's perfume (John 19:39). The women procured and brought even more spices (Luke 23:55f.; Mark 16:1). Thus, her supposed extravagance did not literally transcend the boundaries of strict economy or thrift, because burial costs were really that great. Could the disciples consistently criticize as bad stewardship what someone paid for a loved one's embalming, when they themselves would have expressed their love and loyalty to Him in a similar way? So, why should they condemn as useless waste her anticipation of Jesus' approaching burial? Because they simply did not believe it would ever happen. This single critical element of unbelief distinguishes the depth of her discipleship from theirs.

2. IT WAS UNSELFISH. In order to honor this poor Man, she had chosen to do without many luxuries which the money for this perfume would have purchased. Her deed was not merely a "good work" (*érgon agathòn*) in the classical Pharisean ethic, but a higher, "noble deed" (*érgon kaiòn*).

Lavishness is the proper expression of devotion and gratitude. No loving expenditure, however seemingly costly, is censured by our Lord, when it is motivated by unadulterated love for Him. True love does not calculate how little it can get by with, but wants to pour out its resources to the limit. How can we consider ourselves lovers of God and Christ, so long as we consider it perfectly respectable to donate to His cause the minimum amount possible before appearing miserly?

The true worth of a gift must be evaluated by its motivation hidden in the soul of the giver. As in Mary's case, only Jesus can discern this with unflinching precision. Ironically, Judas' avarice passed for prudent concern for the needy, while Mary's generous devotion was judged wasteful. We cannot now anoint His physical body, but we can pour out generous love on His Body, the Church, and care for His poor brethren (25:35ff.; Gal. 6:10).

3. IT WAS DEVOTION TO CHRIST. She knew that Jesus was no mere poor, itinerate rabbi, but the Christ of God! Can what is done for such a Person out of devotion to God ever be *anything but good work*?
4. IT WAS THE INTELLIGENT EXPRESSION OF A FAITH THAT PLANNED. (See on 26:12.) Prudence and common sense are also God's gifts to us, lest we neglect other duties to Him and His people by an extravagance at one point that impoverishes others

whom we are called to serve. While Mary's tender lavishness strikes a responsive chord in our hearts, it must not justify thoughtless excesses on our part that do not show the same intelligent foresight and planning she did. In fact, Jesus praised her intelligent faith in His predictions of His death and her determination to do what was in her power to act on them. It is a serious misreading of His words to see her gift as prompted by an unseeing emotion that reacted unthinkingly on this impulse alone.

5. **THE DECISION WAS RIGHTLY HERS ALONE.** Mary's was the privilege to dispose of her own property as she deemed right and proper under God, without answering to men. The disciples' criticism implied their right of judgment, as if the property were theirs to use in ways they deemed more practical and prudent. But Jesus does not back down, require Mary to undo her deed, or apologize. Rather, He defended her freedom to dispose of her own property in a manner consonant with her discipleship. By pointing to an appropriateness they had not seen heretofore, He informed their ignorance and defended her liberty.

Jesus' treatment of the disciples' scruple becomes a masterful demonstration of how to deal with opinions today. (Cf. Rom. 14:1—15:7; I Cor. 6-10.) Although they cited an unexceptionable Scriptural principle, neighborly love for the poor, they applied it in such a way as to contravene another principle, the right of private property (Acts 5:4; implied in Deut. 23:23). Further, the disciples had argued against her apparent violation of the rule of utility or expedience. (Cf. I Cor. 6:12; 10:23f.)

Therefore, the dichotomy between the useful and the beautiful can be a false dilemma, because a deed of loving adoration like Mary's can be both. How should we apply His dictum? Is extravagance ever right? The lavishness of Christian love is sanctioned not only by Jesus' express approval of Mary's generosity, but also by His own marvelous example, the fact to which her act pointed, "for my burial." Consider His own deliberate "waste of love" which He was about to pour out on Calvary:

1. He considered His death absolutely useful, directed to a practical end, but, at the same time, it was the expression of a love that must act lest its heart burst.
2. Similarly, there is extravagance in lavishing His love on us through His death, because not everyone for whom He died would even

appreciate it. He gave a sacrifice sufficient to save the race, fully knowing that few would accept it. His gift is extravagant because none of us could ever deserve it. What others might term "wasteful," in our gratitude we call "magnificence."

3. We may confidently transcend the considerations of our usual "produce":
  - a. By spending lavishly, even emotionally, on Jesus, completely overwhelmed by the lordly generosity of His love.
  - b. This means unstinting, unselfish liberality to others. By freely "squandering" our love on the unthankful, the undeserving and the unlovable, we imitate Jesus Himself.
  - c. The kind of self-sacrificing liberality here promoted is that unsparing big-heartedness that gives, even sometimes going beyond what could be considered strictly "necessary," and a prodigality that almost demands that it be restrained by those responsible to organize it. (Cf. Exod. 35:4f., 36:3-7; Acts 4:32-37; II Cor. 8:1-4; Phil. 4:10.)

### TO EVERY DUTY ITS TIME AND PLACE

**26:11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.** Granted, this is addressed to the objecting disciples, but is there an allusion to the specific duty of the thieving Judas, who, as treasurer of the common fund, must disburse funds to the poor, but robbed them himself? Jesus' statement implies, "You can help them any time you want" (Mark 14:7). That Mary has given so generously to me now does not mean she cannot be kind also to the poor on other occasions. Particularly lavish generosity to special friends once in awhile and a consistent, thoughtful meeting of the needs of the poor are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

*You have the poor always with you.* How carefully and deliberately He avoids rejecting the disciples' principle. Rather, He supports them in believing it! His own deeply felt concern for both the spiritual and physical needs of the poor was above question. He had expressed it in formal lessons and in His own practice (5:7, 42; 6:2ff.; 19:21; Luke 6:20f., 30, 38; 21:1-4; John 13:29). It was a fundamental theme of His whole ministry (Luke 4:18; Matt. 11:5). His doctrine embodied all that God had said about His own love for the poor (Deut. 15:11 in context! Ps. 41:1; Prov. 14:20f., 31; 19:17; 29:7; Isa. 58:1-7; Jer. 22:16; Dan. 4:27; Amos 2:6f.; 4:1; 5:11; 8:4, 6). Jesus' attitude

encouraged people to believe that God is keenly interested in those who watch over the poor (25:34-40). His later New Testament doctrine is no less explicit (Acts 2:44f.; 4:32f.; 11:27-30; Rom. 12:8, 13, 16, 20; II Cor. 8:9; Gal. 2:10; 6:2, 10; Eph. 4:28; I Tim. 6:18; Heb. 6:10; 13:1ff.; James 1:27; 2:5, 15f.; 5:1ff.; I John 3:17f.; III John 5-8). His identification with the poor and concern for them should forever dispel any suspicion of neglect on His part.

Nonetheless, Jesus is an intensely practical realist, fully aware of all human differences that contribute to one's ability to obtain and retain wealth. He is no visionary that dreams of the day when every trace of poverty should be wiped from the earth. He is not guilty of that oversimplification that preaches a communistic economic equality. He knows that all men are not equal. He is perfectly aware of the inequalities of position and opportunity, the fluctuations of health, the many variables in intelligence, ability and personal aggressiveness. So, because He comprehended that these inequalities are often immutable ingredients of the human condition, with these words He committed the care of the poor to His own people. He knew by experience the happiness poor people feel from receiving needed help (Luke 8:1-3), and the even more special joy of Christians who share it in His name (Acts 20:35).

It has always been the spiritual descendants, not of Judas, but of Mary, who have truly cared for the poor. Where Jesus Christ is lovingly adored, truly believed and obeyed, the poor are best cared for. Really, nothing poured out in honor of Jesus can ever be called a waste. In fact, in a general sense, everything that truly promotes the progress of His Kingdom according to His criteria brings with it a deeper concern for the poor, a more practical interest in the Third-World peoples, a broader grasp of our common, interrelated human brotherhood.

It is against this background that one can understand Jesus' tenderly sad observation. *But me ye have not always* (cf. 9:15). While normally appropriate to avoid luxury for self so as to be able to assist the poor, Jesus pleads the extraordinariness of the present circumstances as justification for Mary's seeming wastefulness. Death makes extraordinary demands that set aside common everyday rules. The moment of His own death was fast approaching. If *anyone* were to prepare His body for burial while He was still able to appreciate the beauty and nobleness of such love, the time was now or never. *Me you have not always*: how completely understated! These disciples had only

a few days left to show their devotion to Jesus before this privilege would be gone forever. But they were blinded, precisely because they sincerely, however, wrongly believed they would have Him always. Unique opportunities to do good pass away, and must be taken when the situation presents itself, when the impulse, the time, the people and the circumstances are ours. The moment must be seized, lest that chance of a lifetime be mistaken for something that could be done anytime, and be forever and tragically lost. In fact, Mary's was the only anointing Jesus received. The other women brought their anointing spices to an empty tomb. The time to do this while Jesus could appreciate it came and went.

#### 4. THE GLORY OF A GENUINE GRASP OF THE GIST OF THE GOSPEL

26:12 **For in that she poured this ointment upon my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.** Normally, *for burial* a great quantity of spices and ointments would be needed (II Chron. 16:14; John 19:39; Luke 23:56; Mark 16:1). Nicodemus alone brought 100 Roman pounds worth (= 32.74 kg or 71.9 lb.). Although Mary had literally anointed only Jesus' head and feet, He accepted her intention as if she had anointed His entire body.

The fact that Mary did not announce the motive behind her act has been interpreted by some as if she could not have intended such a solemn purpose. Consequently, skeptics assert either that Jesus gratuitously attributed this (false) motive to her, or else the Evangelists simply invented this pious, but false, attribution. How strangely inconsistent or wilfully blind are those critics who are so ready to confuse the anointing in Luke 7:36-50 with Mary's act as two contradictory accounts of the same event, but do not see that Jesus could discern Mary's true purpose just as clearly as He read the heart of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:39f.)!

Others, to avoid this irreverence, suggest alternate explanations:

1. Jesus spoke only of the "effect of the woman's act, not her conscious purpose. . . . She meant nothing but to show her love" (Bruce, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 309). This explanation is plausible, since the Semitic idiom often ignores Greek nuances and substitutes purpose for result. (Cf. Blass-Debrunner, §391, 402(5); also Arndt-Gingrich, 378.)

2. Is it possible that Jesus magnanimously attributed to her a motive she did not dream, but would have embraced, had she thought of it? Is it not true that a goodly amount of our service given out of pure devotion to Christ possesses a value that goes beyond our comprehension?

Only clear testimony of Scripture can prove that Mary did not understand nor consciously intend her deed as Jesus declares it. Argument alone is incapable of establishing the contrary. Only her embarrassed demurring could do this. But the Gospel is silent, leaving only Jesus' unequivocal testimony standing. Apparently, Jesus simply read her thoughts, stated them and that settles it.

### MARY BELIEVES ME!

In Mary the Lord has found at least one disciple who really understood Him. She had willingly let Him be the Teacher to say whatever He wanted to, even if it contradicted popular philosophy and traditions and even defied her own logic, desires and emotions. In short, her discipleship is real and profound. She believes unquestioningly that Jesus really means what He has been saying all along about His impending death. She could grasp the unmistakable conclusion that Jesus' predictions must mean that He would not defend Himself by supernatural means. So she perceived that He is going straight to the cross and that, when His bitter archenemies had Him under their power, she might never be able to approach to prepare His body properly for entombment. Therefore, she planned ahead ("she took beforehand," Mark 14:8 *proélabon murisai* means that she used foresight. Prematureness has nothing to do with it.) She bought the perfume and "kept it for the day of my burial" (John 12:7). Now, therefore, seeing the opportunity she ardently desired would come, she made her move decisively. No wonder Jesus thinks her noble act worthy of a Gospel memorial!

Mary, the model of faith that  
comes by hearing the word of Christ

**26:13 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her. This is the only occasion**

Jesus ever raised a monument to any specific human being. But it is not an eternal memorial to a bottle of perfume, but to a genuine faith that acts intelligently while the opportunity to serve God is ours. It would never occur to a Judas that, were Jesus to remain a dead Messiah nicely embalmed with Mary's ointments, *this gospel never would be preached in the whole world!* Jesus' prediction must be dismissed as the illogical vagaries of a dreamer, unless, despite His death and burial, He could rise again and infuse into His followers that courage to preach which only His triumph over death can give. It simply escaped Judas that, in the midst of all this morbid talk about suffering and death, Jesus uttered this stupendous prediction: *This gospel shall be preached in the whole world!* (Cf. 24:14; Mark 13:10.) Even if the betrayer actually heard it, in his unbelief, he discounted Jesus' certainty of victory. And yet, Jesus' declaration is not simply the prophet's foresight. It rings more like the proclamation of a Monarch. Unlike any earthly potentate, this King decrees her glory, while He Himself is under the death sentence. There is a bold irony that gives character to His words:

1. Christ's promise of immortal renown to Mary boldly reveals His own self-awareness, as He consciously stood in the shadow of His own cross. His bold prediction could never be automatically self-fulfilling without resurrection. But *this Man* was not just another human. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 224) taught:

His divine foreknowledge is demonstrated by the literal fulfillment of his prediction, and as the knowledge of this incident reaches forward into coming ages and spreads abroad still farther in the earth, the demonstration becomes continually more surprising.

2. He who presents Himself to Israel for consideration as Messiah is no local Christ, interested exclusively in the narrow concerns of one people. Despite His own self-limited mission "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24; 10:6, 23), He always looked beyond these horizons to the regions beyond. (See Special Study, "Gentiles," at the conclusion of this volume.)
3. What is to be preached in the whole world shall include her anointing Him for *burial*, and He dares call this *good news* (this gospel)? But "burial" includes the atoning death of matchless life, hence summarizes His sacrificial suffering for humanity.

4. If Mary realistically faced the fact of the cross, even more so does Jesus! He has freely walked to Jerusalem to face those who hate Him bitterly. His exhortation to the Apostles on their early mission, "Do not fear those who can kill the body, but cannot destroy the soul" (10:28), is not to be tested in the crucible of Jesus' own personal experience.
5. Whereas Judas and the others, so far from heralding this deed, would have strangled it aborning, Jesus considers this "absurdly wasteful act" so characteristic of the spirit of the true Christian that to proclaim His message demands its exemplification by reference to what Mary of Bethany did!

But in what sense(s) must Mary's noble act serve as a memorial of her, inciting to its imitation everyone who reflects on it? Perhaps the fact that Jesus did not specify how this is to work was intended to push us to ponder, lest we brush aside its less obvious, but essential significance. In every part of this story what is as obvious as the aroma of her perfume, is her love. But this is not expressly indicated as a model for us. We do not love Jesus just because Mary did. We love Him, alone because of what He means to us personally. Some of the same reasons that drew her to Him draw us too. So, what should her example mean to us?

1. HER FAITH UNDERSTOOD. By faith she was enabled to share in "the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). By believing what He predicted, she actually grasped understandingly and shared sympathetically what He was going through. Hence, she points to that sympathy of mind whereby we "follow in His steps" (I Peter 2:20-25).
2. HER FAITH IS A MODEL OF GREAT INITIATIVE DESPITE WEAKNESS. Weak, feeble, really unavailing to avert the imminent tragedy of Jesus' death, this disciple did what she could. She showed great initiative by taking creative steps that were unthinkable even to Jesus' closest disciples who had deliberately blindfolded themselves to the reality of His impending death. Faith freed her from this prejudice, empowered her to take decisive steps to express her love while there was time, even if what she believed about Jesus' future was emotionally crushing. She simply dared to believe Him and took the initiative in harmony with what He said. Faith is *envisioning what the Lord says He intends to do in a given situation* and doing, in harmony with His Word, what lies in our feeble

power, even if our weak efforts seem unavailing. (Remember Luke 21:1-4!)

3. **HER FAITH WAS BOLD.** Her courage braved the potential criticism of others and risked rejection, even by Jesus Himself. After all, she probably did not discuss this move with Him to get His approval beforehand. Sometimes, as in her case, it is utterly impossible for us to defend the rightness of our actions to the satisfaction of everyone's doubts. Sometimes our good actions do *not* speak for themselves, because our true motive remains impossible to prove. Our only consolation lies in our confidence in His love and in believing that our Lord approved our endeavor to do His will. This bold discipleship is what it means to express our real commitments "before men" (10:32).
4. **HER FAITH WAS UNCALCULATING.** When she first began, her act was rejected as senseless waste and esteemed by no one present but Jesus. Who could have imagined the undying glory that would surround her uncomplicated, adoring act? Yet, without planning it, she did something simple that was destined to guarantee her immortal fame. This is but a live case that concretely illustrates the high estimate our Lord places on loving service, however humble. (See note on 25:35-40.)
5. **HER FAITH WAS CREATIVE.** Her detractors' rebuke revealed their own slavery to traditionally recognized forms and mechanisms of social redemption. Her grasp of Jesus' message and spirit permitted her to appreciate her own broad freedom of action. No express command or approved precedent guided her decision. She simply believed His death-predictions and invented an unheard-of, scandalizing way to externalize her loving devotion for Him and her faith in His revelations. *And He approved it.* Dare we act this way in relation to our worship offered the same Lord who promotes her example? Do we have this same freedom in our faith? (Cf. "How to Avoid Becoming a Pharisee," my Vol. III, 375ff.)

These considerations invite us to believe Him implicitly, love Him devotedly and do whatever we can while the opportunity is ours. May our faith drive us to passionate, generous self-giving, not caring how many know what we think about Jesus! In our feeble, fumbling efforts, we too shall not be able to do much for Jesus, but let it be said of our discipleship, "They did what they could!"

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. Who was Simon the leper? Where was his house? According to John, who else was present at his house?
2. When, exactly, was Jesus in Bethany for the event described here? Which Gospel writer positively dates this event chronologically? Where? On the basis of what facts can this date be known?
3. Name the woman who anointed Jesus' head and feet.
4. List the differences between this anointing and the one that is recorded by Luke 7:36-50.
5. Of what was the perfume container made? How does this detail add to the cost of the ointment? How much ointment did it hold, according to John?
6. What kind of ointment was used? On what basis could its value be estimated? According to John, how much was it worth? How much would it be worth today?
7. Describe the disciples' reaction to the anointing: what was their judgment and on what principle was it based?
8. According to John, who led in the criticism? Reconcile this with the other Gospel statements about who complained.
9. Show how Jesus used the disciples' own argument against them and, at the same time, defended the woman.
10. In what two ways was this anointing a "good work"?
11. What did Jesus mean by "You will not always have me"?
12. What motive did Jesus say was in the woman's mind when she anointed Him? In what sense was this anointing for that specific purpose?
13. Where else had Jesus spoken before of the world-wide proclamation of the Gospel? (book and chapter)

## SECTION 64

JUDAS AGREES WITH JESUS' ENEMIES  
TO BETRAY HIM

(Parallels: Mark 14:10, 11; Luke 22:3-6)

TEXT: 26:14-16

14 Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, 15 and said, What are ye willing to give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they weighed unto him thirty pieces of silver. 16 And from that time he sought opportunity to deliver him *unto them*.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. "What do you think of Judas? Whose son is he?" are two important questions in this section. Collect all of the facts revealed in the New Testament about this man. Trace the development of sin in his life as it leads up to the sins of betrayal and suicide.
- b. If Matthew already mentioned him before (10:4), why does he now present him here as "one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot"? Is he copying from a document that has this fixed, traditional expression, or does he have some better reason for expressing himself this way? If so, what is it?
- c. Why do you think Matthew inserted Judas' secret agreement with Jesus' enemies right in this place after the anointing in Bethany? Why not include it before it, even omitting the anointing? What connection is there between the two facts, if any?
- d. Do you think the authorities welcomed Judas' offer or treated him with diffidence? Would they be two-faced with him, their own confederate?
- e. Judas was greedy (John 12:6). Do you think that he dickered with the authorities over the price for betraying Jesus? Or did he even question the price? On what basis could he accept it as is?
- f. Do you see any significance in the final price settled upon of thirty pieces of silver? If so, what is the significance? If not, why not?
- g. Why should the priests be so glad to pay Judas in advance? What is the psychological advantage for them to do it this way?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve Apostles, conceived a diabolic plan. He went away and, with the Jewish clergy and officers of the Temple police, discussed a scheme for handing Jesus over to them. His offer was: "What are you willing to give me, if I hand him over to you?"

Upon hearing his proposal, they were delighted and promised to give him money. So he agreed. At this they counted out to him thirty silver coins. So, from that moment on he began watching for a good chance to betray Jesus when no crowd was present.

## SUMMARY

His decision fixed by Jesus' undimmed "defeatism," Judas went right to the authorities to work out a mutually agreeable plan for

Jesus' capture. His incredibly timely offer was immediately welcomed by the rulers who awarded Judas the purchase price of a slave for his efforts. Thereupon he began plotting a course which would lead to his plan's realization.

## NOTES

### 1. THE TRAITOR'S TRADE-OFF

26:14 **Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests.** When did he go? Matthew, having concluded the historical flashback, now returns to his narration of events that occurred "two days before the Passover" (26:2-5; cf. Mark 14:1f.; Luke 22:1-6). However, *then*, points to the anointing in Bethany as the psychological, if not the immediately chronological, background in which Judas' determination to betray Jesus finally crystallized. The element common to Matthew's two paragraphs (26:1, 2 and 26:6-13) is Jesus' repeated allusion to His death. His "disgusting negativism" apparently proved too much for his ambitious disciple. But the betrayer did not arise from the Bethany supper to hurry over to Jerusalem in hopes of concluding a midnight deal with the powers-that-be. The likelihood is very slim that he would have found them assembled on that Sabbath evening. That he did not see the priests for several days is clearly implied in the council's desperation as late as "two days before the Passover" (26:3-5). Further, the Triumphal Entry on the day after the Bethany anointing, as also the furious purification of the Temple on the following day, would have seemed to Judas to cancel all of Jesus' negativism, pointing to the immediate realization of his own nationalistic hopes. But, when ensuing events did not confirm this prognosis and Jesus continued to arouse the bitter enmity of every segment of Jewish political life into a white-hot-rage, Judas grew more frustrated with Jesus' political inaction. Then, Jesus' latest prediction of His own death tipped Judas over the brink (26:2, 14). Two days before Passover, inspired by a diabolical plan, he sought out the priests and found them ready to talk. (See below on *priests*.)

*Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot.* That Matthew should resort to this rather elaborate introduction of someone already introduced and described (10:4) has been thought to verify the theory that he merely follows stereotyped tradition. But, as we have seen, to establish his own credibility, Matthew needs no copy-book similarity

to the other Evangelists. To assume categorically that he unimaginatively copied other work is to fail to take him seriously. Rather, Matthew remained shocked that the ultimate betrayer of the Messiah of Israel should turn out to be *one of the twelve*! Nevertheless, he does not draw back from recording this sordid picture of one of his brother-apostles, because, as has been his approach throughout this Gospel, he must show the disciples' slow growth in faith through their many falls. Thus, even in this horrible contradiction of discipleship, he objectively displays the options that confront every potential disciple. In the life of *Judas Iscariot*, Matthew warns, are to be found the same alternatives and components of betrayal which tempt *every disciple*. Not merely *one of the twelve*, but all of them faced the scandal of the cross. Matthew's message is that *one of the twelve* cracked, because of the flaws in his own personal faith. By examining this negative example, we may learn what flaws of our own would, in the end, make us turn against Jesus.

### WHAT MADE JUDAS DO THIS?

Many tend to judge Judas in the light of the grandeur and divinity of the One whom he betrayed, but not according to his own motives. Hence, in the highly-colored, negative language used to describe the heinousness of his crime, they obscure Judas the real man. He becomes the model of all hatred and infamy with not one scruple left to cause him to shudder at the baseness of his treachery. He is pictured as wilfully forgetting everything he knew about Jesus: His compassionate love, His matchlessly holy life, His unequalled teaching and His supernatural deeds.

While the view is credible, it fails to take into account another route that alienation from Christ can take, a route which, ironically, still permits the disciple to believe himself a loyal follower of the Lord. It is the road more commonly taken by those who believe themselves wiser than He, more practical, more versed in worldly know-how, who simply know how God's Kingdom should be run better than the King Himself. They retain their own right to rule, their own worldly ambitions, their private, "unimportant" sins. But this too is no less a betrayal of Jesus Christ. In fact, it is essentially more diabolical, because perpetrated by those who, in the name of loyalty; to Him, actually prove false to (= betray) everything He stands for. The result is the same and he who does it is no less a "betrayer" or "traitor"

(10:4; 27:3; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:16; John 6:71) or a "devil" (John 6:70). It is from this standpoint, therefore, that Judas Iscariot is the more valuable case study in discipleship destroyed. So, what made Judas betray the Lord? We must see him as . . .

### JUDAS ISCARIOT, THE COMMON SINNER

GOD did not predetermine his choices, because, aside from His determinate counsel and foreknowledge which decided *that* the Christ would be betrayed, by *whom* or *how* were items neither foreordained nor the subject of prophecy. (See on 26:24.) Here we see most clearly the interplay between divine sovereignty and human freedom. The Sanhedrin, following its own political fears, defined Jesus a wanted man (John 11:57). Here was opportunity for *anyone* to betray Him. Judas, moved by his own ambitious desires, took the bait.

SATAN? Luke (22:3) attributes this diabolical plan directly to the devil who entered into Judas. And why not? Judas had left too many doors open in his life. (See below.) This, however, was no literal possession, hence presents no problem fatal to the moral freedom of Judas who remained fully free in his conscious choices. As will be seen, Satan already owned much territory in Judas' thinking. (Contrast John 14:30b.) Judas did not offer Satan any resistance. (Contrast James 4:7.) Why should he? Judas thought Satan's ideas sound, because they were already so identical with his own concepts! There is no overwhelming demoniacal power in Judas' case any more than in our own (I Cor. 10:13). Rather, Judas found the temptation to betray Jesus irresistible, because he found his own concepts irresistible.

AVARICE? His stealing from Jesus' common fund revealed His love of money (John 12:6). His proposal to Jesus' enemies, "What are you willing to give me?" (26:15) seems to confirm his greed. That covetousness is not an altogether insufficient motive was ably defended by Farrar (*Life*, 551f.).

How little insight can they have into the fatal bondage and diffusiveness of a besetting sin, in the dense spiritual blindness and awful infatuation with which it confounds the guilty, who cannot believe in so apparently inadequate a motive! Yet the commonest observance of daily facts which come before our notice in the moral world, might serve to show that the commission of crime results as frequently from a motive that seems miserably small and inadequate, as from some vast and abnormal temptation.

And covetousness is simply "civilized" idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5).

However, while avarice can drive a man to be cold and unscrupulous, crushing conscience to gain more, this does not explain how such a man could have ever become the disciple of that poor Man who had no place to lay His head (8:20). Surely, in first-century Palestine there were faster routes to sheer financial success!

VINDICTIVENESS? Was the rage of hatred now boiling in Judas because of the gentle rebuke he received at the anointing in Bethany? Had he not taken a public stand for righteousness ("given to the poor"), but was rejected? No matter how kind were Jesus' words, did he feel humiliated publicly? Did Jesus' defense of Mary's "sentimentalism and lavish waste" wound and provoke the betrayer to the limit? This hypothesis does not explain the time Judas had to cool down, his apparent inactivity for four days from the anointing until his going to the priests. Further, raging hatred, burning to get even, does not explain Judas' surprise, as great as anyone's, that his bargain actually resulted in Jesus' death sentence (27:3ff.). Contrary to his own expectations, his ill-conceived plan had produced precisely the opposite result from what he intended. Then, as he had never accepted Jesus' own self-understanding of Messiahship, he was left no alternative but to imagine Jesus' total failure. Shattered and hopeless, Judas took revenge on himself.

Again, vindictiveness finds satisfaction, not in silver, but in blood. Were Judas merely vengeful, he would have despised pay offered for his deed, since revenge itself would have been pay enough.

THWARTED POLITICAL AMBITION. Much of Judas' motivation is bound up in his reason for being Jesus' disciple in the first place. Contrary to popular belief, *Judas Iscariot* may well have been a Galilean. (See note on 10:4 my Vol. II, 272f.) He would have been exposed to the nationalistic fervor for which the Galileans were noted. Further, *Iscariot*, family name of both Judas and his father, has been interpreted by some as an Aramaic transcription of the Greek *sicarios*, meaning "assassin" from the Latin *sica*, a "dagger." This label covered "the most fanatical group among the Jewish nationalists quite hostile to Rome; they did not hesitate to assassinate their political opponents" (Arndt-Gingrich, 381,757). If so, Judas stood farther to the political right than Simon the Zealot. So, if Judas followed Jesus in the hope of fulfilling the extremist political ambitions of this misguided nationalistic spirit, the fierce radicalism of Judas would be decidedly frustrated by many elements:

1. Jesus inexplicably refused to preach the standard Messianic doctrine generally held by "right-minded" patriots. He steadfastly declined to inaugurate a materialistic Kingdom of God (John 6:14f., 66-71). Because the Lord so emphatically opted for a spiritual messiahship and refused Israel's crown (John 6:15), perhaps Judas discerned the beginning of the end of his own materialistic dreams of personal wealth and power. His political disenchantment may have become a bitter, vindictive drive that impelled him to formulate—even if ever so slowly—which move to make.
2. Then Jesus constantly warned of heartaches, set-backs, even martyrdom ahead for His most intimate followers (24:9ff.). Utopian dreams of wealth and glory for anyone were conspicuous for their absence.
3. Jesus' apparent failure to meet the public challenges of the Pharisees (12:38ff.; 16:1ff.) in smashing ways that would command belief, shook all the Apostles, not merely Judas (15:12; 16:6). And the enemy kept attacking.
4. Jesus' doctrine of the cross (16:21-28; 17:22f.), for the disciple that neither understood nor believed it, would be deeply discouraging and liable to be labelled "morbid defeatism." Exasperatingly, Jesus continued to use this language (26:2, 12).
5. Perhaps most disgusting for Judas was Jesus' obvious inability to seize the political advantage. After feeding the 5000, He turned down Israel's crown during a moment of high revolutionary spirit among His most ardent followers! Now He did not follow up the Triumphal Entry by declaring the Kingdom. Rather, He continued inciting the authorities to implacably bitter antagonism (Matt. 21-23).

In short, Jesus' gradualism, His emphasis on spiritual power and intangible riches and His repudiation of power politics all add up to the disenchantment of ANYONE thoroughly enamored with instant political solutions and tangible spoils. Even John the Baptist seemed staggered by the direction and slowness of Jesus' program (11:2ff.). Sadly, evaluation of Judas' motivation is not difficult, because there are so many political activists like him! The kind of person that would betray Jesus in light of these elements is fundamentally selfish, impatient, ambitious and demanding. This volatile mixture adds up to one clear controlling passion in Judas: INSTANT UTOPIA. Judas' thievery is of a piece with his disappointment at Jesus' political impotence. Avarice and desire for security from the pain, grief and sufferings of the world will lead a person not only to steal, but impatiently

demand the immediate, permanent solution that instantaneously eliminates intolerable people and problems. Immediate solutions is Judas' operating procedure. The long, hard road of patient teaching, self-giving service and suffering to transform man's present ills he considers absolutely intolerable. Such a man is fundamentally a person without faith. He cannot allow God time to transform into things of beauty and eternal worth all that he finds disgusting and imperfect.

Therefore, in his disgust with Jesus' astounding lack of progress, he may have resolved to force the issue by precipitating a supreme crisis that would force Jesus to declare the formation of the Kingdom, accept the Crown so long refused, and issue a call to liberate Israel from the oppressor, and initiate a program that would elevate and enrich His loyal supporters.

It is even conceivable that Iscariot, honestly felt that this betrayal could promote the success of God's plan for Israel. He was enough of a believer in Jesus to foresee that his Master could prove Himself invincible in the ensuing clash, consequently would never even risk death. Perhaps Judas imagined that the end of the affair would find Israel's enemies outwitted, frustrated and finally beaten, as on so many other occasions when Jesus had shown Himself the master of every situation. Not incidentally, Judas richer by far more than thirty pieces of silver, could chuckle smugly at their discomfiture.

Thus, Judas could expect himself to be forgiven this momentary "sin," because, by personally masterminding what he may have considered Jesus too impractical and other-worldly to put together, he would actually become Christ's benefactor. Not incidentally, too, Christ's consequent political indebtedness to Judas the king-maker promised enormous financial benefits for his daring foresight and brilliant execution. Thus, even in this betrayal Judas could consider himself quite loyal to Jesus. He could not only keep up the appearance of friendliness, but actually feel it. Was he not acting in the best interest of Jesus and of the other disciples, indeed of all Israel? From this point of view, the intention to have Jesus killed is the furthest from Judas' mind.

So, in reality, Judas is not a man apart, the archtype of monstrous wickedness. This traditional image is as unrealistic as it is popular. It is but a caricature that blurs our own spiritual kinship with so much of Judas' own failures as a disciple. So, what was his fatal flaw? Barclay (*Matthew*, II,367) well concluded:

However we look at it, the tragedy of Judas is that he refused to accept Jesus as He was, and tried to make Jesus what he wanted Him to be. It is not Jesus who can be changed by us, but we who must be changed by Jesus. We can never use Jesus for our purposes; we must submit to Him to be used for His. The tragedy of Judas is the tragedy of the man who thought that he knew better than God.

To see Judas as a misguided, worldly-wise king-maker is neither to excuse his crime nor detract anything from the real awfulness of his sin (26:24) or from the certainty of his condemnation (Acts 1:25). Rather, to picture him as a common disciple who followed ordinary temptations that lie before any of us has the intensity practical value of showing how desperately real is our own vulnerability to the temptation to be false to the Lord, while contemporaneously believing ourselves upright citizens of the Kingdom of God in good standing.

*Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests.* Even though the Pharisees also shared the determination to put Jesus to death, that Judas approached *the chief priests* and "captains" (Luke 22:4) points to an encounter different from the Sanhedrin's earlier informal meeting (26:3ff.). Perhaps he went first to the Temple police requesting permission to make an interesting offer *to the chief priests*. These "captains" (*strategoís*) are probably not Roman soldiers, since this military term could also apply to the Levitical Temple guards who maintained order at all times in the Temple. (Cf. Num. 8:5-26; II Chron. 23:1-19; Acts 4:1; 5:24; see also Josephus, *Wars* VI, 5,3; Edersheim, *Temple*, 147ff.; cf. 2 Macc. 3:4.) Eventually, these Levitical officers would need to be brought into the picture, because, being under the authority of the chief priests, they could be counted on to participate in Jesus' arrest (Luke 22:52). Approaching one of these who could take him directly to Caiaphas, Judas could present himself as ready to obey the official order to turn Jesus in to the authorities.

There is no evidence that Judas appeared before the entire Sanhedrin to bargain with its members, unless it be assumed that the aforementioned council were still in session (26:3ff.). That all three Synoptics mention only priests and Levites, points not to the Sanhedrin, but to the clergy alone. Judas' approach, therefore, was not the cause of a convocation of the Sanhedrin, but an unexpected element that radically catalyzed the ecclesiastical authorities' decision to act.

## 2. THE TAWDRY TRANSACTION

26:15 and said, What are ye willing to give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they weighed unto him thirty pieces of silver. Jesus had not formed a clandestine movement, but operated openly. But the chief priests' dilemma lay in their fear to arrest Jesus publicly and in their ignorance about His whereabouts in private during the constant movement of people during the feast. So, Judas' entire usefulness and offer hinged on his valuable particular knowledge of Jesus' habits. (Cf. John 18:2.) Being a member of the most intimate group of disciples, he could conduct the Lord's foes directly to Him during the private, evening hours in the absence of cheering crowds to protect Him from arrest. Further, to avoid capturing the wrong person, Judas could correctly identify Jesus during a night raid.

*And they weighed unto him thirty pieces of silver.* Mark and Luke state that "they promised (engaged) to give him money," to which Luke adds, "He agreed." Was this merely the early stage of the negotiation between Judas and the leaders, and they later actually gave him the full amount after consigning Jesus to them? Both Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 902) and Lenski (*Matthew*, 1012) argue that the priests paid right away. The testimony of Mark and Luke only means to record the priests' instant reaction to Judas' offer, to which he declared agreement, then, according to Matthew, they paid him outright. The psychology of the situation would demand that the priests seize this unparalleled chance by morally binding Judas to go through with the betrayal.

That Matthew reports, *They weighed unto him*, rather than "They paid him," alludes to the use of a scale to determine monetary value by weight (*étesan*, "they placed [on the scales] - "they weighed"). Because coins were then in common use (cf. 5:26; 10:9, 29; 17:24, 27; 22:19; 25:15ff.; Luke 10:35; 15:8), three things may have been true:

1. *Weighed* might just be a linguistic holdover among Palestinean Jews, meaning simply "paid."
2. Either they actually weighed out the silver in the ancient manner, sanctimoniously showing religious precision in doing their wickedness.
3. Or they simply handed him the coins, but Matthew utilized the ancient expression to point to the prophecy of Zech. 11:12 (*étesan tòn mishthòn mou triàkonta arguroùs*, LXX; Matthew has *argùria*).

Taken in shekels, *thirty pieces of silver* equals 120 denarii, the equivalent of four month's wages of a common day-laborer. Nonetheless,

that so little should be awarded him by the Jewish authorities for the life of a MAN seems unrealistic and out of proportion to the value of their Prey.

1. Some see this low evaluation as the priests' contempt for Jesus. Perhaps the priests belittled the assistance Judas offered, and finally conceded a small compensation for his offer which would be but a minimal convenience to them. The brevity of our account, however, neither affirms nor denies such haggling. In fact, if Judas sought merely to push Jesus to act, *any* price that appeared to cover his true motive would be right.
2. Did this sum represent only the down-payment of more? This is highly doubtful because,
  - a. The non-coincidental allusion to Zech. 11:12 suggests that this amount was the total price. (See on 27:9, 10.)
  - b. When Judas had been paid in full for betraying Christ and he discovered that his plan had backfired, he returned only *the thirty pieces of silver* (27:3ff.). There is no indication of more.

So, the priests haughtily judged that the value of a slave (Exod. 21:32; cf. Gen. 37:28) was quite adequate for the Nazarene! Edersheim (*Life*, II,477) sensed the high symbolic significance, unappreciated, of course, by the Temple bosses:

The Lord was, so to speak, paid for out of the Temple—money which was destined for the purchase of sacrifices; and that He, Who took upon Him the form of a servant, was sold and bought at the legal price of a slave (Phil. 2:7; Exod. 21:32).

Ironically, *thirty pieces of silver* is the "handsome" price paid the Lord for His service in caring for Israel. (Zech. 11:12; see only on Matt. 27:9.)

If Judas' petty bargain for the going price of a male slave seems paltry, this petty cash embezzler's love of money would not stick at turning his private plans to profit. On the other hand, if he dreamed that by pushing Jesus into a crisis which He could escape only by inaugurating the long-awaited Davidic Kingdom, then Judas stood to gain far more materially in the ensuing glory and inflowing wealth that must come. So, *thirty pieces of silver* would not be the last income realized at the expense of the Galilean Prophet. This small bargain would thus have been but a minor incident on the way to bigger things.

## The task targeted

26:16 **And from that time he sought opportunity to deliver him unto them.** *From that time* means from two days before the Passover (26:1; Mark 14:1). Thus, on Tuesday night (the beginning of Wednesday) he made his contact and on Thursday night (the beginning of Friday) he fulfilled it. But this interval is also his last moment to repent and revoke his evil agreement and return the blood money, confessing his sin. (Cf. 27:3ff.) But, from his point of view, why should he want to fail to help Christ do what He apparently cannot bring Himself to begin? Such is the blindness of error!

The *opportunity he sought* must be one in which the crowds favorable to Jesus could not impede His arrest. In harmony with the Sanhedrin's fear that people would riot, should the police attempt a public arrest, Judas agreed to the priest's strongly recommended directive "to betray him to them in the absence of the multitude" (Luke 22:6; cf. Matt. 26:5). Despite the leaders' enthusiasm prompted by Judas' unexpected offer, their basic solution arrived at earlier has not fundamentally changed. Postponement until after the feast is still a fundamental part of their strategy, because, although they sense their ability to move more freely than they could have without the guidance of an insider like Judas, a risky collision with the people still spelled political suicide for them.

But something imperceptible has changed. Unbeknownst to them, by their accepting Judas' proposal, they surrendered absolute control of the situation back to Jesus, because he could now control the events by guiding Judas to their disadvantage. (See on 26:21-25; cf. John 13:27.)

Undoubtedly, the priests and Judas imagined themselves in control of the situation, unconscious of the overruling providence of a God who can make even the wrath of men to praise Him (Ps. 76:10). Those who would not willingly serve Him as instruments of righteousness, can, without violation of their human will, be made to serve the purposes of God. Even while they are bent on gratifying their selfish desires, God's program moves irresistibly forward. While they will not consciously cooperate with Him, He shall still be glorified in their reactions to His providence through the elements He brings into their lives and in the choices He places before them. Because He has the right to decide their options, He rules, while leaving completely unshackled their human freedom to decide.

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. When did this consultation between Judas and the authorities occur?
2. Explain Matthew's elaborate introduction of Judas as "one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot."
3. List facts in Judas' life with Jesus that conspired to tempt him to betray Him.
4. What circumstances in Jerusalem facilitated Judas' going to the chief priests to offer to turn Jesus over to them?
5. State the probable terms of the agreement.
6. What is today's value of thirty pieces of silver?
7. List other Biblical allusions to thirty pieces of silver.
8. In what way did Judas' offer create the mechanism whereby the Sanhedrin's decision not to capture Jesus during the feast was completely reversed so as to make Jesus' earlier prediction come true?
9. Describe the type of opportunity the authorities wanted Judas to find that would be ideal for capturing Jesus. Why did not Judas betray Jesus immediately?
10. How much time did Judas think He had to deliver Jesus into their hands? How much did he actually have, according to the actual history of the events?

## SECTION 65

JESUS CELEBRATES HIS LAST PASSOVER AND  
INSTITUTES THE LORD'S SUPPER

(Parallels: Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-39a; John 13:1—18:1)

TEXT: 26:17-30

17 Now on the first *day* of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Where wilt thou that we make ready for thee to eat the passover? 18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Teacher saith, My time is at hand; I keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. 19 And the disciples did as Jesus appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

20 Now when even was come, he was sitting at meat with the twelve disciples; 21 and as they were eating, he said, Verily I say unto you,

that one of you shall betray me. 22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began to say unto him every one, Is it I, Lord? 23 And he answered and said, He that dipped his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. 24 The Son of man goeth, even as it is written of him: but woe unto that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had not been born. 25 And Judas, who betrayed him, answered and said, Is it I, Rabbi, He saith unto him, Thou hast said.

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it; and he gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. 27 And he took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins. 29 But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

30 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why did the disciples ask Jesus where preparations for the Passover should be made?
- b. Why do you think Jesus had not previously announced the location?
- c. Does it not appear that His instructions, as to where this feast is to be celebrated, are deliberately devious? What possible purpose could there be for such ambiguousness, if His disciples needed to know? Or did they?
- d. Since Jesus was a wanted Man, do you think His disciples would have encountered difficulties with the authorities as they presented the lamb for slaughter by the priests?
- e. What is the householder, where the Passover is to be eaten, to understand by Jesus' mysterious phrase, "My time is at hand"? Do you think His most intimate disciples understood it? If so, what would it mean to them? If not, how could Jesus expect a less intimate disciple to grasp it? If so, why say it?
- f. On what basis could Jesus count on the host's consent?
- g. Why do you think Jesus waited until evening to go to the appointed house for the Passover meal?
- h. If Judas already knew he would betray Christ and Jesus Himself had clearly predicted that someone would do this, what possible

purpose could be served by repeating this prediction at the Passover supper?

- i. If Jesus' intention were to predict Judas' betrayal, why did He continue to use such ambiguous language right up to the very departure of Judas? Should not prophecies be expressed in clear, literal language without all this beating around the bush?
- j. How do you think Judas reacted to Jesus' blunt, even if somewhat ambiguous, prediction that one of the Twelve would betray Him? How would you have reacted, if you were Judas and knew what he knew?
- k. Jesus said, "The Son of man goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man, if he had not been born." How does this affirmation relieve God of all responsibility for Judas' actions and lay the blame squarely on the betrayer himself?
- l. How does the above-cited affirmation prove that Judas' betrayal did not catch God unawares, but, rather, was actually foreseen and planned for by God, to carry forward His own program?
- m. How does this statement of Jesus demonstrate categorically that the widely-believed hope, that everyone shall finally be welcomed by God, is simply without any foundation in truth?
- n. Do you think that Jesus waited until the Passover supper was completed before instituting the Lord's Supper, or that He simply transformed its various elements as they moved from one part of the Passover ritual to the next, thus giving new meaning to them? Why do you decide as you do?
- o. Is there any special symbolism involved in Jesus' taking the Passover bread, blessing it and breaking it for distribution among the disciples? If so, what symbolism?
- p. How could Jesus say, "This is my body," with reference to the bread, when, as a matter of fact, He was present bodily there before them?
- q. Now deal with the cup: how could its contents be called "my blood," if His blood were yet in His veins?
- r. If Jesus is our Passover Lamb, why did He make no use of the literal lamb to say what He uses loaf and cup to teach?
- s. Why did He term it "the blood of the covenant"?
- t. Why would not Jesus drink that cup again until the day it could be drunk "new with you in my Father's Kingdom"? In what sense would He do this? In this particular context, why is this promise such glorious news?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The first day of Unleavened Bread arrived, on which it was necessary to sacrifice the Passover lambs. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and get the Passover meal ready for us to eat."

"Where do you wish us to go and do this?" they asked.

"Go into the city," He told them. "Just after you enter the city, a certain man carrying an earthenware water-jug will be coming toward you. You follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher sends word: My appointed time is near. At your house I shall celebrate the Passover. Where is my guest room where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will then show you a large upstairs room all furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."

The two disciples did as Jesus had directed: they left and went into the city. They found things just as He had told them they would. So they prepared the Passover.

When the evening hour came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve and took His place at the table with them. They were reclining around Him at the table.

[At this point Luke records Jesus' earnest desire to eat the Passover with the Apostles and the first cup. John records the washing of the disciples' feet and the first intimations of the unclean betrayer. Perhaps Luke's narrative of the ambitious contention among the disciples about their relative personal importance should also be included here.]

As they were at table eating, when Jesus had spoken about the betrayer and His own direct connection with God, He became deeply agitated in spirit and exclaimed, "I tell you the truth, one of you who is eating with me will betray me."

The disciples were deeply pained to hear this. One by one they began to ask Him, "It is not I, is it, Lord?"

"The one who will betray me is right here at the table, eating supper out of the same dish with me!" He answered. "The Son of man is going to His destiny, as the counsel of God has determined for Him and as the Scriptures have written of Him. But what misery awaits His betrayer! It would have been better, if that man had never been born!"

The disciples looked at one another, puzzled and uncertain as to whom He referred. They began to question each other about which of them was going to do this.

One of Jesus' disciples, an especially close friend, was reclining at the table on Jesus' right. So Simon Peter signalled to him: "Ask Him whom He is talking about."

So that disciple leaned back close to Jesus and asked, "Lord, who is it?"

Jesus responded, "It is the man to whom I give this bit of food after dipping it in the sauce."

So when he had dipped the morsel, He handed it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then, after the morsel, Satan took possession of him, and he spoke, "Surely, it is not I, is it, Rabbi?"

Jesus said to him, "It is you, not I, who said what is the case. What you are going to do, make quick work of it!"

Now, no one at the table guessed what He meant by this. Some surmised that, because Judas was in charge of the common fund, He was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast." Others thought He meant that Judas should donate something to the poor. So, after Judas accepted the morsel from Jesus, he left immediately. And it was night. . . .

After Judas' departure, Jesus commented, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and in Him God is glorified. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and do it at once."

[Here John records the new commandment.]

As the meal proceeded, Jesus picked up some unleavened bread. When He had blessed it by giving thanks, He broke it and shared it among the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it: it represents my body which is sacrificed for you. Do this to remember me." Similarly, after the meal was concluded, He lifted a cup of wine. When He had given thanks, He offered it to them, stating, "Drink from it, all of you."

So they all drank from it. Then He went on.

"This cup represents my blood which seals the new covenant with God, the blood which is to be shed on behalf of multitudes of people for the forgiveness of their sins, I can tell you for sure that I shall never drink this wine again, until the day comes when with new meaning I drink it with you in my Father's Kingdom, the long-awaited Kingdom of God!"

[Here John reports Jesus' prediction that the disciples cannot follow Him where He must go. Peter promises total loyalty, but Jesus predicts his threefold denial. Luke also reports the predicted denials and the unexplained sword purchase (Luke 22:31-38).

Jesus presents His last discourse (John 14-17). John 14:30 may mean that Jesus and the Twelve arose to leave, but lingered further in the Upper Room until Jesus completed His instruction and His intercessory prayer. Otherwise, what are the probabilities that Jesus did all the teaching of John 15-17 while walking through the streets of Jerusalem that night?]

When Jesus had spoken these words, they sang the Passover Psalms. Then they went out of the city across the Kedron Valley, as He was in the habit of doing, to the Mount of Olives.

### SUMMARY

Jesus organized the Passover supper preparations in such a way as to leave Judas ignorant of the location until the last minute, and, in doing so, demonstrated His divine foresight. During the supper itself He clearly pointed out His betrayer, while contemporaneously giving him clear warning to back out. When, however, Judas left, Jesus gave new meaning to the bread and wine. It would now represent His own suffering and the ratification of the new covenant. After a long series of far-reaching instructions, He led His men out to His appointment with destiny.

### NOTES

#### I. PREPARATIONS FOR THE LAST SUPPER (26:17-19)

**26:17** Now on the first day of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Where wilt thou that we make ready for thee to eat the passover? According to Luke, Jesus called Peter and John to begin these preparations. This question, then, reflects their obedient response to His order (Luke 22:8).

Technically, *the Passover* and the feast of *unleavened bread* are two distinct festivals, the former being a one-night celebration on 14 Nisan and the latter a feast lasting one week from 15-21 Nisan. (For their history and character, see Exod. 12:1-51; 13:3-10; 23:15; Lev. 23:4-8; Num. 9:1-14; 28:16-25; Deut. 16:1-8; Ezek. 45:21.) Two circumstances led people to call both feasts by the same name.

1. Because the feast of *unleavened bread* immediately follows the Passover, at which only unleavened bread is also eaten, the day of the Passover itself could be considered *the first day of unleavened*

*bread*, although technically, the longer feast began on the evening of 14 Nisan (= 15 Nisan).

2. If Jews purified their houses of all leaven during the evening of 13 Nisan, or at the very latest, during the morning hours of 14 Nisan (Cf. Edersheim, *Temple*, 221), the 14th becomes virtually *the first day of unleavened bread*, even though, technically, it is Passover.

Even Josephus (*Ant.*, XIV,2,1; XVII,9,3; cf. XI,4,8) calls the feast of unleavened bread "Passover," which would make *the first day of unleavened bread* coincide with the Passover (cf. *Wars*, V,3,1), precisely as does Matthew. Josephus does this fully aware that the official *first day of unleavened bread* occurs on the day following (*Ant.* III,10,5). He even speaks of the feast of unleavened bread thus: "We keep a feast for EIGHT days, which is called . . . of unleavened bread" (*Ant.* II,15,1). This makes Passover virtually part of the feast of unleavened bread.

This popular, untechnical language explains why *the first day of unleavened bread* is clearly defined by Mark and Luke as "the day . . . on which the passover lamb had to be sacrificed." Both authors use imperfect tense to point to Jewish customary practice. Further, all the Synoptics describe it as the day on which Jesus intended to eat the Passover. Again, since no one—neither the disciples nor the host—questions Jesus' order to prepare the Passover meal at this particular time, one is led to the natural conclusion that this moment is the regular time. No one asks, "Why at this unusual time?" but, simply, "Where do you wish us to prepare?" Therefore, *the first day of unleavened bread*, according to Matthew, is Thursday, Nisan 14. This is because the events narrated from the Passover supper until Jesus' burial all occurred by normal Jewish reckoning, on Friday, Nisan 15, which began at sunset on the preceding day. (See Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:42; Luke 23:56; Matt. 27:62; 28:1.)

### IS MATTHEW'S DATING WRONG?

Even a superficial reading of Matthew's chronological notices concerning events in Jesus' Last Week must lead to the conclusion that he reports a consistent, straightforward story: Jesus actually participated in the Passover supper at its normal time on the evening of

Nisan 14, was captured and tried that night by Jewish authorities, and, next day (Nisan 15) was tried and crucified by the Romans. He was in the grave by Friday evening (= beginning of Nisan 16), all day Saturday (= Nisan 16) and arose Sunday morning, Nisan 17. With this accounting the other two Evangelists are in total agreement.

Some scholars attempt to prove that John contradicts (or silently corrects) this view. Then they seek alternative solutions that would leave the Synoptics a semblance of historical respectability, notwithstanding this apparently undeniable error. Accordingly, say the scholars, Jesus ordered a supper on Nisan 13 that in many respects resembled the Passover, but, of course, without the lamb. At this meal He instituted the Lord's Supper. Consequently, then, being arrested that night, He died on the cross at the very hour the rest of the Jews were sacrificing their paschal lambs on Nisan 14. Thus, He fulfilled the Passover symbolism. But does this reconstruction fit the facts?

Several unprovable presuppositions are necessarily involved:

1. The Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, gradually, but erroneously, came to identify what occurred in the Upper Room with the Passover itself, whereas John supposedly corrects this erroneous connection. Their motive, it is supposed, was to give emphasis to Jesus' fulfillment of the Passover typology, by picturing Him as dying at the very hour the paschal lambs were slain.
  - a. However, why did the Synoptics so obviously place Jesus' death on the day AFTER what they mistakenly took for a Passover meal, instead of linking it with the Passover itself? They set Jesus' death too late for synchronizing the supposed typological symbolism with His death. Either they inexplicably failed to see this contradiction or such symbolism was not part of their belief or purpose.
  - b. Further, if the symbolic synchronization of Jesus' death with the Passover slaying were truly God's great design, surely the Gospel writers would have been alert and sympathetic to this nuance and as much as anyone else. Granted that they linked Christ's death with the slaying of the Passover, how explain how these intelligent writers could blunder so obviously as to connect Jesus' Last Supper with the actual Passover (i.e. 14 Nisan) in their histories, rather than with the night preceding His death, i.e. Nisan 13, as according to the theory, they should have done?

2. It is also assumed that the Evangelists did not intend to describe a regular Passover meal. Contrarily, their every phrase clearly affirms the traditional preparation for and participation in a common Passover supper. Absent is any inkling of deviation from the standard celebration, either on the part of Jesus, His disciples or their host. Simply underline the word "Passover" in the following texts for complete conviction of this fact: 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-10, 13, 15.
3. If Jesus were crucified at the very hour the Passover lambs were slain, how could we explain the multitude of Hebrews milling around the cross, when they should have been in the Temple most deeply involved in preparing their own lambs by sacrifice and in purchasing whatever was needed for their own celebration of the Passover that very evening? (Luke 23:48ff.; Matt. 27:55f.; Mark 15:40f.).
4. Affirmations in John are thought to militate against the version presented by the Synoptics:
  - a. *John 13:1* supposedly dates the Last Supper as before the regular Passover time. John simply affirms, however, that "Before the feast of Passover . . . Jesus loved" His disciples. It does not date the supper, because John next documents how Jesus acted at the feast "when the supper [finally] came" (John 13:2).
  - b. *John 13:29* When Judas left the Last Supper, the others supposed he went to purchase items essential to the feast. Some usually assume that no shops would have been open at that late hour, were it the regular Passover night. Again, they assume "for the feast" means "for the Passover" proper next day.
    - (1) However, "for the feast" means only for the total seven-day celebration, not strictly for the Passover. (See above.)
    - (2) How would the high holiness of the Passover stop merchants from desecrating it more than the solemn sacredness of the Temple would stop the priests from desecrating it by their operating their animal market with its precincts?
    - (3) Edersheim (*Temple*, 394; cf. his *Life*, II,508 and Append. XVII,786) citing the last two chapters of the Mishnah, notes that, even on the assumption that the Sabbath followed the Passover—a belief essential to some interpretations of John 19:31—

Though servile work was forbidden on the first Paschal day, the preparation of all needful provision for the feast

was allowed, and must have been the more necessary, as, on our supposition, it was followed by a Sabbath. Indeed, Talmudical law distinctly allowed the continuance of such preparation of provisions as had been commenced on the 'preparation day.' . . . Even now Rabbinical ingenuity can find many a way of evading the rigour of the Sabbath-law.

Therefore, anyone who assumes that absolutely no stores would be open hence nothing could be purchased on Passover evening must be able to prove it, against the conclusion of the disciples who were well acquainted with what could or could not be done in Jerusalem on Passover night. (See Keil- Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, II,439.) This greater freedom explains the disciples' reasoning. Edersheim (*Life*, II,508) argues even further:

The mention of these two suggestions by the disciples seems almost necessarily to involve, that the writer of the Fourth Gospel had placed this meal in the Paschal Night. Had it been the evening before, no one could have imagined that Judas had gone out during the night to buy provisions, when there was the whole next day for it, nor would it have been likely that a man should on any ordinary day go at such an hour to seek out the poor. But in the Paschal Night, when the great Temple-gates were opened at midnight to begin early preparations for the offering of . . . the festive sacrifice, which was not voluntary but of due, and the remainder of which was afterwards eaten at a festive meal, such preparations would be quite natural. And equally so, that the poor who gathered around the Temple, might then seek to obtain the help of the charitable.

c. *John 18:28* Because the Jews feared defilement that would prohibit them to "eat the Passover," many assume John means the regular Passover meal had not yet been eaten. This assumption is fallacious because:

- (1) "Passover" does not necessarily nor exclusively refer to the Passover meal proper, since *tò pàscha* has the following well-documented meanings: (See also Josephus' usages above.)

- (a) The Passover lamb itself (26:17, 19 = Mark 14:12, 14, 16; Luke 22:7f., 11, 13, 15)
- (b) All that concerns the meal itself (26:19; John 13:1f.)
- (c) Passover day itself (Exod. 12:14, 17; 13:3; Lev. 23:5; Num. 28:16; John 12:1)
- (d) The entire Feast of Unleavened Bread is loosely called the Passover (cf. Ezek. 45:21; Luke 2:41 = Mark 14:12) and Passover is termed "first day of unleavened bread." The use of the expression "the feast" refers, not merely to the Passover Supper, but to all the festivities of the seven-day festival (John 13:29; 19:14; Matt. 27:15 = Mark 15:6). This use of "the feast" harmonizes with other examples. (Cf. John 4:45 = 2:23; Tabernacles was a seven-day feast yet termed "the feast." Cf. John 7:2, 10f., 14, 37; Passover, John 11:56; 12:12.)
- (e) The offerings of the Passover week. (See Edersheim cited below.)

So, the Pharisees were concerned about their ceremonial purity to eat other sacrificial meals of the Passover week. (Cf. Deut. 16:2f.; II Chron. 30:22.) So, John is in perfect harmony with prophetic precedent, since Ezekiel calls "the Passover, a feast lasting seven days" (Ezek. 45:21, NIV, esp. in Heb. and LXX). Thus, John refers to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, treating it as virtually part of the Passover.

- (2) Edersheim (*Temple*, 218) reminds that Hebrews must bring TWO sacrifices for the Passover: the regular Passover lamb and a peace- or fellowship-offering. (Cf. Exod. 23:14ff.; 34:18f.; Deut. 16:16f.; Lev. 23:37f.) Because this second offering was in addition to the Passover lamb, it could be offered anytime during the Passover week, but *must be eaten only by persons who were ceremonially clean* (Lev. 7:19-21). This explains the hypocritical preoccupation to remain outside Pilate's defiling quarters. *They could not have eaten their Passover peace-offerings, not the Passover lamb itself, in a state of defilement.*

To this it might be objected, "Was this fellowship offering ever called 'eating the Passover,' as John terms it?" Edersheim (*op. cit.*, 251f.; also 395) proves that this Chagigah ("festival offering") was specifically Paschal, citing a learned Jewish writer, Dr. Saalschutz, "The

whole feast and *all its festive meals* were designated as the Passover. See Deut. 16:2; comp. 2 Chron. 30:24 and 35:8, 9; *Sbach. 99b, Rosh ha Sh. 5a*, where it is expressly said, 'What is the meaning of the term Passover?' (Answer) 'The peace-offerings of the Passover.' Thus, "it is this second Chagigah which the Jews were afraid they might be unable to eat, if they contracted defilement in the judgment hall of Pilate" (Edersheim, *op. cit.*, 218).

- (3) Further, because defilement from whatever cause always ceased at sundown with washing (Lev. 11:24f., 28, 31; 15:1-27; 17:15, etc.), these Jews could never have feared defilement for the regular Passover Supper which is *always eaten after sundown*. Rather, they feared defilement that interfered with their sacrificing and eating the festive sacrifice (Chagigah) that very day, Nisan 15.
- d. *John 19:14* is rendered by some (cf. RSV), "Preparation FOR the Passover" which describes the day Jesus was tried, therefore, He partook of an early pseudo-Passover supper or did not respect the proper, normal date. But this unnecessarily forces John to contradict the Synoptics. However, this verse should be rendered (as NIV): "It was the day of Preparation OF Passover week" (*paraskeuè tou pàscha*). That *pàscha* here does not refer to the Passover meal, but to the entire week, is evident in that John already recorded that meal which the Synoptics unquestionably connected with "eating the Passover (lamb)."
- e. *John 19:31* is interpreted to mean that Jesus was crucified on the day used for preparation for the Passover which that year fell on the Sabbath making it "a high day."
- (1) But *Paraskeuè* actually says "Friday" as clearly as words can communicate. Not only does this term mean "preparation" in general, but, as a technical term for a day of the week, it means "Friday" (Rocci, 1422; Arndt-Gingrich, 627). Josephus (*Ant.*, XVI,6,2) clearly documented the day before the Sabbath as the day of preparation in the time of Augustus, i.e. a custom in use long before Jesus' death. John further defines the day meant, by his registering the Jews' urgency to remove the bodies from the crosses, lest they remain there "on the sabbath." Therefore, it was Friday. Their concern arose because "that sabbath was a high day," but

this does not prohibit its being Saturday. Again, John himself agrees that Jesus was in the tomb before sunset on Friday (John 19:42). Further, this Saturday was called a "high day," not because it was the first day of Passover, but the second, when the firstfruits offering was made. ("Sabbath" in Lev. 23:11 refers to the Passover rest, not Saturday. Cf. Josh. 5:11; see Keil-Delitzsch, *Pentateuch* II, 439-441.) No evidence exists to show that, in the year Jesus died, there were any coincidence between (a) *the first day of unleavened bread*, and (b) the weekly Sabbath, which would make that Saturday a special Sabbath, or "high day." Rather, that Saturday, Nisan 16 that year, was a special Sabbath, because the weekly Sabbath coincided with the firstfruits offering. (See Edersheim, *Temple*, 256ff.)

- (2) That Joseph of Arimathea could buy a linen shroud or that the women could prepare spices on Nisan 15 is not contrary to the hypothesis that the day was a festival involving Sabbath rest. (That Nisan 15 was Friday is proven by the women's resting next day, "on the sabbath according to the commandment.") So they were able to function on the Passover without any consciousness of having violated its sanctity (Luke 23:56). Obviously, the festival rest was not observed with the same rigor as normal Sabbath rest. Edersheim (*Temple*, 396) cites the Jerusalem Talmud that "expressly declares it lawful on Sabbaths and feast-days to bring a coffin, graveclothes and even mourning flutes—in short to attend to the offices for the dead—just as on ordinary days."

Therefore, is it not of utmost importance to seek out those facts that render possible a satisfying, yet uncontrived harmony between the Synoptics and John? Any supposed contradiction between them is the creature of intolerable ignorance and uncritical acceptance of pseudo-scholarly hypotheses that show a philosophical and moral bias toward driving a wedge between the Lord's witness.

5. The various movements of Jewish leaders and other people involved in Jesus' arrest, trials and crucifixion all on the night of gravest importance and high solemnity is no argument against believing the Last Supper identical with the Passover. Their mad zeal to crush the Galilean Prophet would completely explain the actions of men who, in trying Him, did not hesitate to violate their own criminal code and tread on the principles of truth and righteousness.

6. The silence of the Synoptics as to whether a lamb were present on the table can be no positive argument that there was none. Since they declaredly intend to describe a Passover meal, they may safely assume that an intelligent reader, who knows anything about a Passover, must also know that, *by definition*, such a supper must include the lamb that was sacrificed. (Cf. Mark 14:12 = Luke 22:7.)
- f. That Jesus observed the Passover regularly is further evidenced by the impossibility of His obtaining a lamb at any other time. Unless He made some exceptional omission of the lamb, of which deviation Scripture silence is complete, the presence of the Paschal lamb on the table meant that the meal was eaten on Nisan 14 at evening. In fact, the lamb, by definition, had to be sacrificed in the Temple and its blood applied to the altar by the priests. But as no Sadducean priest could be induced to comply with exceptional requests of "that renegade Nazarene," no Paschal lamb would be sacrificed at any time other than the traditionally appropriate time. Hence, no Passover supper could be observed complete with lamb, until the correct day for slaying it.
7. John's Gospel shows incidental agreement with the Synoptics with reference to the release of Barabbas. They say that customarily a prisoner was to be released "at the feast" (27:15 = Mark 15:6) and John specifies "at the Passover" (John 18:39). But this conversation between Pilate and the Jews occurred in the morning (27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66; 23:1; John 18:28; 19:14; cf. Mark 15:25). Therefore, Jesus' crucifixion and Barabbas' release could never have occurred on 14 Nisan, since the forenoon hours of that day could not be termed "the feast" nor "the Passover," except by a very loose use of language, because the feast does not begin until evening. Otherwise, Barabbas was officially released *before* the feast.

Consequently, Matthew's dating is neither wrong nor contradictory to that of John. (See Seth Wilson's "Was Jesus Crucified on Friday?" in Butler's *John II*, 405ff.)

### The passover

26:18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Teacher saith, My time is at hand; I keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. Evidently Jesus intended to remain

outside of Jerusalem (perhaps at Bethany?) while Passover preparations were going on. This accomplished several practical purposes: He risked no untimely clashes with the authorities and by His absence He did not distract worshipers from their own preparations. *Go . . . to such a man (pròs tòn deina)* is Matthew's summary of how the disciples were to find the proper house. (See PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY for Mark and Luke's information.) It is extremely doubtful that Jesus mentioned the man's name, because Judas, by inquiry, could have learned his address and directed the police there before Jesus could finish teaching His men (John 13:31—17:26). For security reasons, therefore, Jesus did not name the man and thus effectually hid the address from Judas. Consequently, He could enjoy that last, earnestly desired Passover meal in an undisturbed privacy with His disciples.

*And say unto him.* The identity of this completely unknown householder cannot be even partially discovered from what Jesus told His men to say. *The Teacher saith. My time is at hand.* For Jesus, this was to be a bitter-sweet hour with its positive side (cf. John 2:4; 12:23; 13:1) and its painful crisis (John 17:1). In His mind, this phrase meant, "the schedule set by my Father for bringing to a successful conclusion my mission to redeem the world." Thus, Jesus proves how thoroughly conscious He was of the impending suffering (John 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). However, *my time is at hand* is not so precise an expression of time that one must assume He thought His suffering were so near that the Paschal meal must be observed ahead of its proper time.

*I keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.* No irregular schedule is implied here; rather the contrary, because, were this some aberration from the norm, a great deal more explanation would be required to convince an unsympathetic householder to cooperate with the exceptional nature of the request. Therefore, it is quite likely that Jesus had already established some previous understanding with this person. That Jesus could describe the needed space as "my guest room" (Mark 14:14), and that it would be "furnished and ready" (Mark 14:15), points even more certainly to a previous agreement. In fact, because thousands of families would be seeking just such a room in Jerusalem for observing the Passover, it is more in keeping with Jesus' foresight to suppose that, to insure absolute tranquility for this Last Supper.

Speculation surrounding the man's identity ranges from people of means and potentially spacious houses like Nicodemus (John 3:1ff.; 19:39) and Joseph of Arimathea (27:57, 60; Luke 23:50), to the capacious residence of Mary, John Mark's mother (Acts 12:12). Was this the same Upper Room utilized by the Twelve and others for prayer and temporary lodging later (Acts 1:13f.)? Nevertheless, the man's identity is as unknown to us as it was to Judas.

The hypothesis of a previous contact does not compromise Jesus' supernatural discernment that guided His two messengers to meet the man bearing the water-pot at precisely the right moment (Mark 14:13ff. = Luke 22:10f.).

**26:19 And the disciples did as Jesus appointed them; and they made ready the passover.** Peter and John entered Jerusalem, saw and followed the man indicated by Jesus. The gracious householder showed them spacious, second-floor room (Mark 14:15 = Luke 22:12). Did Jesus mean that it would be furnished with cushions to sit on and a low table, or that it had already been inspected for leaven? Perhaps the Apostles were to do this latter task before bringing the other elements for the feast such as water, basin and towel (John 13:4f.).

Merely because nothing in this entire account is ever said about a paschal lamb does not prove that there were none, or that Peter and John could not have procured it, or that Jesus deliberately celebrated the Passover one day earlier than the official date. That they could have procured the lamb is obvious for several reasons:

1. The Law required that the lamb be selected on 10 Nisan (Exod. 12:3, 6). This means that the lambs all be set aside on Sunday, the day Jesus made His Messianic entry into Jerusalem. Would the necessity to select the lamb four days early be obviated in Jesus' time by purchasing directly from Temple stock preselected and approved and kept among Temple sacrificial animals until purchased by Passover buyers? (Cf. John 2:15.) However, it is morally unlikely that Jesus, who severely condemned the market in the Temple proper, would send His men there to take advantage of its convenience, unless, of course, that markets were by now re-located somewhere outside.
2. That the two Apostles could have slain the lamb at the regular time is completely reasonable, because of the vast assembly of Hebrews who must crowd the slaying of their lambs into the afternoon hours of Nisan 14. Thousands of lambs were normally slain

between three and five o'clock (*Wars*, VI,9,3) by hundreds of priests with the assistance of Levites who skinned them (II Chron. 35:1-19). It is only remotely possible that one of the apostles would be recognized by any unfriendly priest assisting with the slaying. Contrarily, were there no friendly priest or Levite to whom they might turn?

Unless the owner of the Upper Room furnished everything, the two disciples would need to procure unleavened bread, wine, the bitter herbs and the fruit sauce and roast the lamb.

## II. CELEBRATION OF THE LAST SUPPER (26:20-25)

26:20 Now when even was come, he was sitting at meat with the twelve disciples. The time is not Thursday evening, 14 Nisan, the beginning of Nisan 15. Presumably, Peter and John's preparations occupied the better part of the day, so they did not rejoin the others until finished. Mark (14:17) notes that Jesus did not even come near the Upper Room until after sunset, perhaps choosing to remain outside of Jerusalem all day for the above-mentioned practical considerations. At the Passover hour everyone else in and around Jerusalem would be deeply absorbed in his own participation in the Passover meal.

Matthew begins his narration where *He was sitting at meat* already. Before this, however, the disciples had bickered among themselves about their relative importance, perhaps as they took their places at the table (Luke 22:24f.; however, Luke's account may not be in strictly chronological order). Then, Jesus washed the disciples' feet to teach them the meaning of true greatness of humility and service (John 13:1-20).

*He was sitting*, rather, reclining (*anékeito*) Roman-style on a couch, or in the Oriental custom, on cushions arranged on the floor spoke-like around a low (U-shaped?) table in the center of which the food was placed. The original Passover institution required Israelites to eat the meal standing (Exod. 12:11). By custom, however, this detail had been abandoned to bring the feast's observance into line with Israel's Egypt, their enjoyment of security in the Promised Land seemed to dictate that they partake of the meal comfortably sitting or reclining.

*With the twelve disciples* means in the absence of many others. The women who came with Him from Galilee (27:55) and the other men were apparently scattered out over Jerusalem as guests in private homes or camped out on the hills surrounding the City.

## The betrayer betrayed

26:21 **And as they were eating, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.** Into the phrase, *as they were eating*, Matthew compressed several incidents that occurred before this. (See PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY; cf. John 13:1-20; Luke 22:14-18, 24-30.)

*Verily I say unto you* gives this statement a deep solemnity that arises out of Jesus' own deep, spiritual agitation (John 13:21). In effect, then, Jesus faced a multifaceted crisis:

1. He must warn the disciples that the impending shock was no surprise to Him, so that they would be the better braced for it when it came (John 13:11, 19). Yet He must not tell them too much, lest they block Judas' freedom to act and thus hinder God's plan.
2. Foreknowledge of Judas' betrayal did not diminish the pain for Jesus. He is fully aware that one of His own men is under contract to betray Him. But He loves that man. Now He must put words to His mounting concern for him, revealing enough to be effective yet without saying too much.
3. He must warn Judas that He knows all, giving him the opportunity to back out while there is time. Yet He knows that Scripture portrays the betrayer as His own intimate friend. So, He cannot force Judas to repent without violating his freedom of choice.
4. Yet, in some way, He must create a spiritually receptive environment in which He could proceed with the last, vital instruction. Until Judas left, perhaps Jesus felt the oppressive spirit that evilly moved the man to act.

So, even if in His humility He washed Judas' feet along with the others'. He must now distinguish him from the rest. But this revelation is not easy for Jesus because of these pressures (John 13:21).

*One of you shall betray me.* Study how Jesus treated Judas, and stand in awe of God's respect for human freedom. The Lord did not expose him by name, violently attack Him or wither him with supernatural power. His arsenal of appeals was multiple and varied: He began by shocking him with the heinousness of what he was contemplating, a move that was calculated to catch Judas completely off-guard. Then He appealed to Judas' sense of fellowship and love. Last, He appealed to Judas' self-defensive instinct by a stern warning well calculated to stir his fear of God. Granted, none of these appeals turned the man around, but it was because Jesus completely respected

his freedom of choice. In no case did Jesus coerce Judas even to save him.

What does this revelation say about Jesus? Even this prediction of the betrayal documents Jesus' confidence in the resurrection. Of what value would it be for a permanently dead Christ to vindicate His true identity by revealing that He knew all along which course events would take? To what purpose assert that He was able to elude the cross, but consciously chose to die thereon, only to remain buried forever? Merely to glorify a one-way martyrdom? If He knew how to avoid death by eluding His betrayer, but was trapped in full knowledge, would He not be judged a fool, if there were no resurrection to free Him from death's clutches? Thus, even though the announcement of the betrayal shook these men, it was nothing compared to the supreme horror of His crucifixion. But when these events had all become history and Jesus stood triumphant on life's side of the grave, what faith-grounding energy they could derive from the knowledge that Jesus saw it all ahead of time and, despite, the temptations to avoid it, and at great risks to Himself, chose to go through it anyway!

What does this revelation mean to the Church? Just as Judas was at the table of Jesus Christ, so rogue disciples, in the role of believer, continue to appear at the Lord's Table, so we must not be scandalized whenever and in whomever it appears.

### Doubt mixed with hope

26:22 **And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began to say unto him every one, Is it I, Lord?** Unable to believe their ears, these men are stunned, grieved. Their distressed reaction cries out the pain of their soul. They are *sorrowful*, not only because Jesus would be betrayed, but because one of them would do this unthinkable, cowardly deed. Regaining their voices, they formulate their hesitant, incredulous question in Greek form that expects a negative answer, "It is not I, is it, Lord?" They hope against hope for a negative answer. Since the Lord did not indicate when the betrayal would occur, they may not even have connected His words with that very night. (Contrast 26:31, 34: "this night.") Perhaps they believed that He referred to some distant future when they might possibly be tempted to betray Him. This explains why their reaction reflects a distressed self-doubt. Otherwise, they could have categorically denied any intention to be

traitor to Him that very night. Instead, *they began to say unto him every one, "one after another"* (Mark 14:19; *heis katà heis*).

1. By this keen sensitivity and genuine self-doubt, they really proved their innocence and deep loyalty to Jesus. Pricked by memories of their lack of graciousness, their weakness of love, the extent of their selfishness and the reality of their doubts, their own conscience accused them. Painfully aware of the deceitfulness of their own hearts, they distrust themselves. But they prove their discipleship real as they bare their soul for His scrutiny and trust His testimony both to the fact just announced and to the identity of the guilty one. Better question one's own maturity and loyalty than doubt the Lord's word!
2. It is a mark of the beauty of their humility that each lays himself open to accusation. Not one of them questioned the loyalty of his fellow apostle, even by insinuation. Peter will break this rule later (26:33). But for now the group is compact, each disciple searching his own heart.

Out of their self-examination arises two observations:

1. It illustrates how thoroughly Judas had succeeded in hiding his plans and even his mentality from his brother-apostles. They saw nothing unusual in Judas' character or talk that would arouse their suspicions. But Jesus read the secrets of Judas' heart.
2. But that the other disciples had discerned nothing unusual in Judas may actually depict to what extent they too shared his false, carnal Messianism. (See notes on 26:14; cf. Acts 1:6; Matt. 20:20ff.; Luke 22:24ff.) This may simply indicate how close to disaster they too walked, were it not their greater confidence in Jesus!

Each dismayed, *Is it I, Lord?*, should have shaken Judas with powerful force, because the betrayer knew the innocence of each man. Finding himself in the moral minority could have persuaded him to repudiate his plan. But the innocence that drove the others to question Jesus does not motivate Judas, so he does not speak up at this point. He may be taken aback that Jesus has somehow uncovered his plot, but for reasons of his own, he cannot be greatly distressed that such a betrayal is really also a denial of his discipleship. (See on 26:14.)

Dare we ask ourselves with the same painful objectivity what kind of situation or temptations would ever undermine our resolve to serve

Jesus, sufficiently to compromise our loyalty to Him? This humility is the only appropriate spirit with which to approach the Lord's Supper. Hope as we might that we be equal to the severe testing of any future situation, no one can predict with certainty that he shall stand up under fire.

### The outrageousness of treason

**26:23 And he answered and said, He that dipped his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.** Rather than use knives and forks to eat, they followed Oriental manners by dipping their food from the common dish with their hands. Some believe *the dish* He refers to was the *charoseth*, a dish of thick spicy sweet-sour fruit sauce composed of figs, dates, raisins, vinegar and other ingredients.

It is evident, however, that Jesus has not yet directly answered anyone's heart-wrenching question. Although *he that dipped* (*ho embapsas*) appears to point to one past act, as if Judas had just done so, the Lord refers, not to an act just completed, but to the fact without reference to time. (Time, per se, is not a necessary part of the sense of the aorist participle, the emphasis being primarily on the act itself, as opposed to a continuing process.) Because many were dipping in the bowl with Jesus during that meal, the dipping would not in itself unmask the traitor. However, probably not all of the Twelve would *dip his hand with [Jesus] in the dish*, as there might be several such dishes on the table for that many people. So, this revelation decidedly limits the list of potential betrayers to those dipping directly with Him, a fact that even more decisively highlights the closeness of this fellowship. Further, if, as Edersheim (*Life*, II,493f.) pictures it, Judas is seated on Jesus' left and John on His right, it would be an easy matter for Judas to *dip his hand with [Jesus] in the dish*. It also explains how Jesus could easily be talking directly with Judas without others hearing (26:25) and then hand him the sop (John 13:25ff.).

Jesus' purpose is not merely to point to the mechanics of eating nor specifically to the seating order at the table. Nor is this a whispered aside to John, as is His later remark (John 13:26), because nothing is said here that would distinguish Judas from the others. Rather Jesus' semi-enigmatic response intends to rouse the moral indignation and stir the conscience of everyone present. This response underscores the moral inconceivableness of the betrayer's act. "He is my table

companion, sharing the deepest bonds of fellowship." The very instrument of betrayal, "the hand of him who betrays me," was not only ready to grasp the opportunity to be false to Jesus, but even at that moment was "on the table with" Him (Luke 22:21).

1. He pushes every disciple to distrust his own heart and loyalty against the presumption that would cause the failure of nearly everyone that very night. Everyone of them, in a sense, *dipped his hand . . . in the dish* then "deserted Him and fled" (26:56).
2. He focuses on the underhandedness with which He, the Lord of glory, would be betrayed to suffer. To the Oriental, to eat together is to form a bond of fellowship for which those who thus participate should be willing to give their lives to protect that of the other covenanters. The ultimate treachery, as Jesus hammers it out, is that one would arise from *this* meal, in which he had shared from the identical dish, and go out to repudiate this covenant of friendship and be traitor to Him.
3. Jesus also demonstrates how thoroughly He Himself is master of this crisis. He is not merely tightening the accusing circle around Judas. His purpose is didactic apologetics: "I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he" (John 13:18ff.).
4. By appealing to the bond of fellowship to which Judas was theoretically committed by eating with Jesus, He intends to rouse Judas' conscience to grasp the enormity of what he planned. Not only does He warn Iscariot that he is found out, He also longs to save him, if possible. For Judas to resist the pressure of his conscience will demonstrate how far he was beyond recall. In fact, his rationalizations (see on 26:14) probably justified his eating with his Victim, because, if we have rightly understood him, he did not admit that Jesus would be hurt in the final life-and-death crisis. Consequently, Judas could see no violation of hospitality, table fellowship or implied friendship. *For Judas, therefore, Jesus was not Lord, nor His appeals or arguments final. Judas still reigned over his heart, not Jesus.*

**26:24 The Son of man goeth, even as it is written of him: but woe unto that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had not been born.** All the disciples needed to come to terms with the true purpose behind Jesus' suffering. Their mistaken sorrow and shock were caused by a wrong view of God's program in which there was no place for a butchered Christ. So He must assure them of two things:

1. *The Son of man goeth* to His death. This is a conscious decision to which no human being is forcing Him. They cannot snatch His life from Him. Rather, He actually intends to lay down His life (John 10:17f.; 15:13; Rom. 5:7). By establishing these priorities, higher even than self-preservation itself, He explains both to Judas and the Eleven why He was making no move to stop this terrible deed.
2. *Even as it is written of him.* His death would not spell the unaccountable victory of evil, but, rather, the marvelous success of God's set purpose. Luke (22:22) has: "as it has been determined." This sovereign decree was well-documented ahead of time by the prophets. (Cf. Isa. 53; Ps. 22; Dan. 9:26f.; Zech. 12:10ff.; 13:1.) These the disciples were far too reluctant to believe. (Cf. Luke 24:25ff., 44ff.; John 20:9.) What is *written of him must take place!* (Cf. Luke 22:37; Matt. 26:54, 56.) Our Savior, God's Son, plants His feet firmly on the Old Testament as upon a firm foundation that can never be shaken. For Him, its message, which centers in His own Messiahship, is the revelation of God's determination to carry out His program to head up everything in Christ. Jesus is unafraid to say this, even if those Old Testament prophecies predict His shame and suffering.

*Woe unto that man . . . good were it for that man if he had not been born.* This sentence sounds so drastic a pronouncement that Judas' sin is often blown out of proportions, as if we common mortals could never match his consummate wickedness. But, elsewhere, Jesus endeavors, with the same vigorous language to impress upon every disciple that all arrogance, self-satisfaction and indifference toward others deserves the severest measures, even death (18:5-9)! Non-existence is to be preferred to sin! (Did this concept lurk in Judas' mind to become the twisted autosuggestion that led to his suicide?) Further, if Judas be thought "a common sinner," (see notes on 26:14), what does this ominous sentence of awful judgment awaiting him mean? Why was Judas' sin so wrong? These questions find their solution in Jesus' warning: *Woe to that man.* In this *woe* are two sentiments:

1. FOREBODING JUDGMENT. While there is not even a breath of personal animosity in Jesus' heart, His sorrowful outcry is founded on the curse that God must pronounce upon such a sinner.
  - a. Judas sinned, because it is a crime to turn an innocent man over to the violence of his fiercest enemies from whom he could never receive just treatment and who are unquestionably determined

to kill him. This is objectively wrong, whatever Judas' subjective reasons might be (cf. 26:14).

- b. Further, it is objectively wrong because of the unspeakable wickedness of any disciple who dares believe himself wiser than the King Himself to organize and manipulate the program and progress of the Kingdom of God to achieve his own ends, whatever they be or whatever his supposed motive.
- c. Judas sinned, because Jesus here exposed and condemned Judas' masterplan to betray Him. This final warning pushes Judas to realize that, if the betrayal now goes through, he must now sin with full awareness. Now there can be no extenuation of guilt nor excuse. That Judas bull-headedly plunged on to this diabolical appointment must mean, then, that he considered his own rationale far more convincing than Christ's attempted deterrent. This is the moral failure typical of most of us. Whether meant as open rebellion or not, Judas hereby defied the wisdom of Jesus Christ!
- d. Judas' sin is objectively wrong, because he did it deliberately, regardless of the use God planned to make of his treachery. The man acted freely. If interviewed about his scheme before Jesus' arrest, Judas would probably openly claim personal credit for the genius of his plot. Nowhere could he have discerned any compulsion from God. Thus, not even Judas would have blamed God for this severe condemnation, because he fully expected something quite different to develop from his plotting. (See on 27:3ff.) Nor is his sin transformed by the fact that God knew he would do it and permitted him to go ahead. God's secret purpose to utilize the man's falseness for His own glory does not change the objective nature of the crime freely chosen by Judas. That Jesus is destined by Divine sovereignty to be betrayed does not in any way minimize the responsibility of His betrayer nor justify him in any sense, merely, because he made God's plan function—any more than Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar or Caiaphas could be excused for their hardness of heart. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 226) rightly argued:

This shows that a man who, by a wicked act, brings about the purpose of God, bears the same guilt as though God had no purpose in it. It is his own act and motive for which he is judged, and not the results which God may have intended to bring out of his act.

2. SADNESS MINGLED WITH LOVING MERCY. Jesus' awareness that with His disciple, Judas, He shall fail, notwithstanding His last impassioned appeals to turn him, wrings from Him this wail of sorrow. If there is any anger in Jesus, it is not so much against Judas the man, as against the superstition, ignorance, selfishness and resultant evil in him that makes him impervious to the last heart-broken pleas to reconsider. Jesus' sadness may also be wrung out of Him, because He foresees the unbearable self-reproach that would engulf Judas when he finally grasped the horrible impact of his deed.

The Lord's dire warning actually treats Judas with merciful indulgence by effectually furnishing the traitor a motive, *hence also a chance*, to back out of the conspiracy. Let the Bible texts affirm that the Messiah must suffer and even suggest that a close friend betray Him (Ps. 41:9; John 13:18), but let not dear Judas decide to be that man!

*Good were it for that man if he had not been born.* But Judas had been born, and his only escape now is by repentance. Nothing in sovereign predestination demanded that *he* be the apostate apostle. God's program would have been fully carried out, even if Judas backed out! Prophecy only said, "Someone." Let that turncoat be someone else! Jesus' solemn sentence must silence everyone who would defend Judas. For, from this point on, to become Judas' defense lawyer is to commit the same sin of which Iscariot himself was guilty: presumption to argue against the Lord's judgment.

Jesus' warning should have shaken the man to core, because He has just affirmed, "I know whom I have chosen" (John 13:18). Although the Lord had not consciously selected Iscariot to groom him for treachery, at the same time He made no miscalculation in choosing him, as if He could somehow be taken unawares by Judas' scheming.

On what basis could Jesus reasonably admonish the man, if He knew all along that this disciple would not submit to His will? Should not Jesus have simply given up without trying? This quandary faces every disciple who must feel the attraction of doubting whether a given reprobate can be brought to repentance. But that Jesus *did* admonish Judas urges us to go ahead and try. Further, He acted in harmony with God and His prophets who also mercifully attempted the impossible. (Study Gen. 4:6f.; Prov. 29:1; Isa. 5:1-7; 6:9f.; Ezek. 3:18ff.; 18:30ff.; 33:1ff. esp. vv. 30-33; Luke 13:6-9, 34f.; Acts 20:25-31.) So, ironically, even from Jesus' full consciousness of His

own failure to persuade Judas, we may draw strength to labor incessantly to win others, despite the ever-increasing odds against their conversion. Even while using every appropriate persuasion to lead them to repent, we may not force their will. And, in the end, their loss will grieve us, but never so greatly as did the loss of Judas to our Lord. But He thoroughly understands what we undergo when we fail, because He has been there too on the night when Judas walked out eternally unpersuaded.

### The betrayer's bold bluff

26:25 **And Judas, who betrayed him, answered and said, Is it I, Rabbi? He saith unto him, Thou hast said.** While others questioned themselves, for Judas to remain silent would have been damning evidence of his complicity. Steeling himself, therefore, he risks exposure. However, if, as we believe (cf. notes on 26:14), Judas felt no malevolence toward Jesus personally, but, rather, a certain superiority, his question here is, from his point of view, neither shameful nor defiant mockery. Rather, as he reflects on Jesus' revelation that a turncoat is in their midst, he may be thinking, "You may call me a traitor today, but tomorrow you will thank me for what I am doing for you!" Further, Judas' curiosity may have been pricked by Jesus' startling announcement, so he now tests the quantity and quality of His intelligence source to discover how much the Rabbi really knows. Or is He merely guessing? So, Judas' question is not wholly false, even if it is a feint.

*Is it I, Rabbi?* While the others called Jesus, "Lord," Judas, alone terms Him, *Rabbi*. Could he not bring himself to confess Jesus as "Lord"? Although to call Him their "Teacher" was a mark of high respect and true discipleship (John 13:13f.), how very far *Teacher* is from confessing Him Lord (Rom. 10:9; 14:9; I Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11)! This title for Judas is really hypocritical, because in this very moment he was unwilling to let Jesus teach him! For him, Jesus was neither really Teacher nor Lord.

Not asked together with the pained questions of the others (v. 22), but after Jesus' stern warnings (v. 23f.), Judas' bold question appears too isolated to have escaped the notice of everyone. But in the confusion of the general debate that arose, while others continued asking, Jesus continued to talk. (Cf. John 13:22; Luke 22:23.) Then, Judas, sensing that continued silence would be damning, speaks.

*He saith unto him, Thou hast said.* Did Jesus really say this, or is this merely Matthew's summary of the incident related by John 13:23-27, in the sense that Jesus answered Judas positively only by handing him the sop? (So, Godet, *John*, 255.) While this signal gesture was intelligible to John, unless Judas (and potentially others) heard the signal, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel, when I have dipped it" (John 13:26), it would not have been understood by Judas to whom the answer here in Matthew was supposedly given. Therefore, Jesus actually spoke to Judas to reveal His supernatural insight into Judas' perfidy. Then later, when Peter gestured to John, He told John the signal, but to no one else.

Although some believe that *Thou hast said* means "Yes" in the same way the American expression, "You said it!" affirms so definitely, several factors must be taken into consideration:

1. Jesus' answer was not heard in the confusion. Everyone was talking, because they began to question one another which of them it was that would do this" (Luke 23:23). Otherwise, had these words been distinctly heard in that electric atmosphere, the other disciples could have pounced on the traitor instantly. Perhaps Jesus whispered His positive answer.
2. Further, if they heard Him, they may not have believed the betrayal imminent, supposing that this revelation referred to some distant future, not to the impending crisis that very night. Because they could not believe that Jesus would die soon, despite His many warnings, they would even postpone the eventual betrayal to some hopefully distant day.
3. However, it may be doubted whether this expression is so precise and definite as would appear from its use elsewhere (cf. 26:64). While not intentionally evasive, this response mildly demurs at the formulation of a statement made by the other party in the conversation. Hence, there is no need to suppose that, had anyone heard Jesus say this, he would instantly recognize Judas for the traitor. Rather, Jesus' less-than-definite expression, "The words are yours," might have even appeared to deny Judas' treachery. "Not I, but *you*, Judas, said it." Thus, whoever overheard it may have judged Jesus' answer too vague for certainty. But a meaningful look of Jesus may convince Judas that He really does know about Judas' plot, but will not tell, leaving Judas really free to decide his own course.

That this response of Jesus is not a precise answer exposing Judas is proven by the fact that no one correctly guessed why Jesus sent him out from the Passover (John 13:28f.). Because *thou hast said* is all that Matthew records, since he omitted the dipping of the sop, we must conclude that Jesus did, in a sense, commit Himself to a positive answer. Nonetheless, because of the foregoing considerations, it may be that this commitment is much clearer in light of subsequent events than it was when originally uttered by Jesus there at the table.

However, one disciple, John, did learn the traitor's identity, not directly nor verbally, but by a gesture (John 13:23ff.). Jesus dipped a bit of bread into the sauce and handed it directly to Judas. Some see this gesture as treating Judas as an honored guest on the part of a careful host, a last, loving attempt of Jesus to break through Judas' reserve of determination to carry out his plan. Jesus thus directed this last appeal to all that was possibly yet loyal in the man. Contemporaneously, by this exquisite gesture of oriental hospitality. He hid Judas even more effectively from all others. But Iscariot's brazenness remained impenetrable, leading Jesus to hurry him out into the night to get on with his demoniacal business. Still, John could not react swiftly enough to block him, because the Lord deliberately hurried the man out before anyone really grasped what was happening. Perhaps John did not react in harmony with that explosive revelation, because he saw that it had been Jesus Himself who sent Judas beyond their reach.

The fact that John alone records the dipping of the sop specifically points to a Passover meal. "In the Passover Haggadah the Passover supper is distinguished from all other meals in several ways including 'on all other nights we do not dip even once, but on this night twice'" (Barrett, *John*, 373; cf. Mishnah, *Pesach*, 10,4). Further, that John alone records that when Judas left "it was night" (John 13:30), points to the Passover meal, not some other, because, while any other supper meal could be eaten at any time from the later afternoon to early evening, "the Passover-offering could be eaten only during that night and only until midnight" (*Zebahim* 5.8 cited by Barrett, *John*, 374).

Judas, strongly urged by the authorities not to precipitate the crisis but to wait until "after the feast in the absence of the multitude" (cf. Luke 22:6), now finds himself discovered. Compelled by his fear of retaliation from the others, if they learn he is to act this very night,

and hurried out by Jesus, he dashed to his fellow plotters to obtain the necessary men to arrest Jesus. Thus, before they really wanted it, he hastened the crisis, making Jesus' arrest and sufferings to occur during the Passover feast contrary to their earlier prudential judgment to wait. But this precipitation of the events began with Jesus' quiet, skillful move that sent Judas forth to his ungodly, morally mad mission. This resulted in the fulfillment, right on schedule, not of the rulers' careful plotting, but of God's eternal plan. Even in this detail Jesus showed Himself Master of men and circumstances, and, bless God, fully Master of Himself!

### III. INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (26:26-30)

#### THE BROKEN BREAD

26:26 **And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed and brake it; and he gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.** The expression, *as they were eating*, by its very ambiguity does not permit us to know at what stage in the Paschal Supper Jesus established His memorial. Edersheim (*Life*, II,510) is undoubtedly right to affirm that "it almost seems as if the Evangelists had intended, by their studied silence in regard to the Jewish Feast, to indicate that with this celebration and the new Institution the Jewish Passover had for ever ceased." Further, Matthew does not indicate when Judas went out. John, who alone reports his departure, does not document the Lord's Supper. So, the final proof is lacking whether Judas partook of it.

However, it is more probable that Jesus did not confuse matters unnecessarily by mixing the exposure and expelling the betrayer with the vital instruction on the Lord's Supper, since the disciples' minds would have wavered back and forth from their consternation about betrayal to their concentration on Jesus' death. But even this is not conclusive, since our own self-examination easily accomplishes this every Sunday as, at the Lord's table, we contemplate our own betrayals of discipleship.

Again, because of the divided manuscript evidence in Luke, scholars are divided concerning the order of the Lord's Supper institution: did the cup or bread come first, or were there two of the traditionally four Passover cups involved in Luke's account, one mentioned before the Lord's Supper and one

during its institution? Two answers are possible to deny the unwarranted assumption that Matthew and Mark are at insoluble variance with Luke:

1. While the available manuscript evidence of Luke is definitely debatable, there are valid reasons for considering it virtually certain. (See the controversy even among textual editors in *Textual Commentary*, 173.) The longer form of Luke's text containing the cup-bread-cup order appears to enjoy the best manuscript documentation and best reasons for its inclusion.
2. There are affinities between Luke's account and that of Paul (cf. Luke 22:19f. with I Cor. 11:23ff.), which, according to some, argue that Paul and Luke share the same oral tradition. Nevertheless, Paul, when reporting the essential facts of the Supper's institution, *always* follows the order: "eat/drink," "bread/cup," and "body/blood," never inverting either of these elements. (I Cor. 10:16f., 21 does not relate the Passover event.) Therefore, if Luke intended to transcribe the tradition as he received it originally from Paul, the original autograph of Luke likely had the rendering given by the majority of textual witnesses: "cup-bread-cup," the first of these cups being related to the Passover, not the Lord's Supper.

*Jesus took bread*, not loaves of raised dough, but the flat, unleavened bread of the Passover meal. *And blessed*: to give God thanks for any food is virtually to bless it, since thanksgiving consecrates it (I Tim. 4:4f.). In this sense, *blessed* (*eulogésas*) and "gave thanks" (*eucharistésas* 26:27; cf. 14:19 with John 6:11; see Mark 8:6, 7) amount to the same thing, hence are practically synonymous. While undoubtedly Jesus always gave thanks for food, His doing so at the Passover was also traditional, not specifically commanded by God as an essential part of this ordinance. Why is it that He *brake it*? Although breaking for others after giving thanks was Jesus' habit (cf. Luke 24:30, 35), Edersheim (*Temple*, 241f.) considers the act a normal traditional part of the Paschal ceremony.

*Take, eat; this is my body*. Because it was *bread* that He broke and gave to them, calling it His *body*, He pointed to Himself as the Bread of life that would nourish them with eternal life. (See John 6:53ff.) *Take, eat*: this symbolic enactment teaches them that His life and its power over death must be appropriated by each disciple in a way so intimate and personal that it may be compared to the assimilation of

food whereby its nutritional power becomes part of the disciple, giving him the power of Christ's life. When taken literally, His language sounds like mystical nonsense. Nevertheless, the implication is that Jesus' life, as this is expressed in His concrete historical incarnation is literally our only life. He really is the only source and sustainer of our physical and spiritual life (Col. 1:17; 3:1ff.; Phil. 1:21; John 1:4; 15:1-11). But this life is not merely our juridical acceptability with the Father, but our personal, conscious feeding our souls on Christ Himself.

### The shared cup

26:27 **And he took a cup, and gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it.** Both Paul (I Cor. 11:25; and Luke 22:20) agree that the institution of the cup took place at the conclusion of the Passover meal. *He gave thanks!* Aside from the traditional blessing of the cup (cf. I Cor. 10:16), how could He sincerely feel like giving thanks to God for the somber meaning of *that cup*? He gave thanks, because He thoroughly believed in the final victory of the program of God whereby the Father would bring joy out of shame and death. He could be grateful, because He believed!

In English, *Drink ye all of it* sounds like "Drain the cup," whereas Jesus said, *All of you drink of it (piete ex autoû pântes)*. This *all of you* stands in evident contrast to the general Roman Catholic practice of forbidding the cup of anyone but the priest, but Jesus emphasized the common sharing. *All of you* does not prove that Judas was present, as if "the Twelve" were addressed as a yet unbroken group, for Jesus could reasonably address this to those yet present and faithful to Him, though Judas be now gone.

Rather, His point is another: unity in the fellowship. As each disciple drinks from the cup he shares not only with every other who does so, but he thereby commits himself to that fellowship. He drinks together with others in the memory of Jesus' redemptive death, thus committing himself to share in the meaning of that sacrifice. This also involves our moral obligation to the rest of the family. More than any other, this must be thought of as "the cup of brotherhood." Western Christians must recapture what it means for people to "drink together," notwithstanding the ungodly abuses of this concept among drunkards. Drinking together constitutes a pledge of mutual loyalty. This simple act practically expresses an oath of

allegiance to live in fellowship with, to defend and die for those with whom one drinks. In the Lord's Supper it is with Jesus Christ and His Church that we drink! There can be no higher allegiance, no more precious fellowship, no more sacred commitment than this. As we eat and drink, honoring the memory of Christ's redemptive sacrifice, we commit ourselves to hate sin and abandon it to express our loyalty to Him. We solemnly consecrate ourselves to the promotion and progress of all that is precious to Him.

In this light, then, there could be little doubt that He also drank from this same cup. Luke's citation, "I shall never eat . . . drink . . . until the Kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:15, 18) is to be interpreted in harmony with Matthew 26:29, i.e. after this sad celebration of the Last Passover, He would no longer participate in the Passover itself until its full significance were realized in the Kingdom. (See on 26:29.)

26:28 **For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins.** After the disciples all drank from the cup (Mark 14:23f.), Jesus furnished this threefold explanation of the cup's symbolism:

1. *This is . . . blood of the covenant.* This entire sentence is a highly compressed reference to the long-awaited arrival of the "new covenant" (Jer. 31:31ff.) which God, through the Messiah (Isa. 42:6; 53:12 death) would make with His people and whereby He would completely forgive their sins, absorbing its penalty Himself. But even such a *covenant* could not be ratified without the shedding of *blood*, as was the ancient Mosaic pact (Exod. 24:8). Because ancient covenants were considered a life-and-death matter, they were sealed with blood, because the life is in the blood (Lev. 17:11). Failure to keep them spelled the forfeiture of the transgressor's life. So, a covenant with a holy God that offers forgiveness of sins and fellowship could not be established without the judicially appropriate substitutionary shedding of blood for the sinner (Heb. 9:22). So, by saying, *the blood of the covenant* (*tô haïma . . . tês diathékes*). Jesus associated this new symbolism with the ancient words of Exodus 24:8 pronounced at Sinai. By using this Mosaic terminology, Jesus deliberately interprets the Mosaic institution as having no meaning except as it finds its perfect final fulfillment in Him. God has never had but one grand scheme of redemption,

even though this was expressed in various covenantal relationships. The initial phases only prepared for the final, perfect *covenant* established by Jesus Christ.

Further, because the Sinaitic pact united the many tribes of Israel into a holy nation, a people for God's own possession with a mission to accomplish in world history (Exod. 18:4f.), it would appear that Jesus intends that the new covenant create the new Israel of God from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues to have the same privilege and purpose. (Cf. I Peter 2:9f.; Gal. 6:16). In this light, then, the Lord's Supper becomes a celebration of this new brotherhood, for it points not merely to a personal covenant with God, but also to the covenantal creation of the new people of God. (See Paul's use of this concept: I Cor. 10:17 and perhaps 11:29.)

2. *This is my blood . . . which is poured out.* His expression excludes natural death and points to the blood-shedding of a sacrificial victim. So saying, Jesus depicts Himself as God's Lamb. (Cf. John 1:29; Heb. 7:27.) His self-giving institutes a new relationship which makes the Mosaic covenant obsolete.
3. *For many unto remission of sins.* His death as a substitutionary sacrifice was the purpose of His coming (20:28). This phrase gives the clearest sense to the suffering of Jesus. His mission is neither simply to teach pious moral doctrine or eschatological visions, nor suffer martyrdom as a supreme model of fidelity to duty. His purpose was to establish a covenant between man and God in the only way it could be: by *blood* which achieves *remission of sins*. By beginning with elements of the Passover, He drew attention to the exodus, no more from the slavery of Egypt, but from slavery to sin. Consequently, participation in the Supper must involve our renewal of our own individual total self-commitment to God's program to eliminate all sin in ourselves and in others, for in Jesus' death God's passionate hatred for sin and His passionate love for sinners meet.

*For many* may be an intentional echo of Isaiah 53:11f. that pictures the Messiah's vicarious death in the place of sinners. He did not give His one innocent life for the forgiveness of but one person—one life for one life—, but for all humanity (John 12:32; cf. Paul's argument, Rom. 5:12-20).

*Unto remission of sins* does not connect forgiveness with participation in the Lord's Supper, as if He said, "Drink . . . for the

remission of sins," so that whoever missed the Supper for whatever reason could not be forgiven until the next occasion for partaking. Rather, the participation is a celebration of a past fact and renews our confidence that we have been forgiven by His blood. All the disciples who partook that night were already "clean" before Jesus instituted this Supper (John 13:10f.; 15:3).

Whereas Luke (22:20) and Paul (I Cor. 11:25) both say, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood," the difference is slight, because the real basis of *the covenant* whereby remission of sins is to be enjoyed, is still Jesus' blood. He simply makes the cup stand for this fundamental principle. When one partakes of the cup, he thereby recognizes and respects *the covenant* and its provisions.

The translation of the RSV, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20) wrongly applies the pouring to the cup, rather than the blood. Even though both "cup" and "blood" are neuter gender in Greek, the appositional phrase, "which is poured out," is located after "my blood," and should be considered to modify it. A much better rendering would be: "this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins."

*Take, eat. This is my body . . . Drink ye all of it. This is my blood.* Literal identification of Jesus' body and blood with the bread and cup is excluded by the fact that Jesus stood there before them, holding these symbols in His hands. Instead, although this eating and drinking are physical acts, they are nonetheless truly spiritual, because they are based on a belief and a participation in something that cannot be seen or felt. While not literally a partaking of flesh and blood, the acts are nonetheless real, precisely because spiritual. What is eaten and drunk is still bread and wine to the sense, but to the soul, it is undoubted spiritual participation in all the reality of Jesus Christ.

*This bread is my body . . . this cup is my blood.* By beginning with elements common to the Passover meal, Jesus pointed to Himself as the true fulfillment of the Paschal symbolism. It is remarkable that He made no direct allusion to the lamb. This is because the lamb is to serve no purpose in the new Supper He instituted, for He Himself is "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed" (I Cor. 5:7). By His choice, therefore, we partake only of bread and wine that symbolize

to us what the Paschal lamb represented to the Israelites, God's Lamb. Thus, because our Lord Himself fulfilled this symbolic feast in all of the rich meaning God intended Israel to grasp as they observed it, our participation in the Lord's Supper fulfills all the symbolic significance of the ancient Passover. So, if Israel's eating of the Paschal lamb signified their identification with all that the lamb represented and accomplished spiritually for them, our eating of the bread and drinking the wine signifies our loyal fellowship in all that Jesus accomplished through His flesh and blood too.

What bread and wine mean to the body, participation in the body and blood of the Lord must mean to our inner life. By sharing in the broken bread and the cup of blessing, we really, even if symbolically, participate in the vibrant life that was His (I Cor. 10:16f.). Therefore, if not to partake of bread and wine, common staples of the Middle-East diet, is to starve, not to absorb Jesus' soul-sustaining love, message and attitudes cannot keep us alive spiritually either. We must have Him to live! For the disciples, the net result of this revelation should be high encouragement to believe that Jesus' approaching suffering was no freak disaster inflicted by brutal men or unforeseen by God. So far from frustrating His purpose, His death would actually accomplish His true mission. While His suffering would seem to be the entirely unjustified sin of resentful, ungodly men, it would be Jesus' freely chosen way of ratifying a covenant which would redeem men from sin and initiate a new age. Rather than shiver in horror of His shameful death, He glorified His suffering by elevating it to a central place in the institutional life of His people. In this covenantal ritual of eating and drinking, they thereby bind themselves once again to keep the covenant, by their own self-giving life like that of Jesus. Thus, the Supper is more than a supremely appropriate commemoration of the great redemptive act He would accomplish on the cross. It is also a continuing reminder of His love and of our dependence upon Him. Thus, the appropriate attitude for partaking of the Supper must be aroused, not so much by an intellectual acceptance of a past fact alone, as by hearty gratitude toward the generosity of Him who did it: "Christ's love compels us . . ." (II Cor. 5:14; Gal. 2:20).

### SPECIAL STUDY

#### GOD IN THE BOX:

#### ROMAN CATHOLIC TRANSUBSTANTIATION

The "miracle" of transubstantiation whereby the bread and wine undergo a change into the literal body and blood of Christ is a tradition

that entered ecclesiastical life around 380 A.D. and became dogma of the faith in 1215. (Cf. Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, chaps. VIII-X for the history of its development.) In 1226 Catholics began to kneel in the presence of the host, the consecrated wafer of the Eucharist kept in a special box called "the Tabernacle," because it was thought to become the presence of Christ in their midst. "Continuing idolatry" must be the judgment on this worship of the consecrated Host, whereby, according to Pope Paul VI (Encyclica "Mysterium fidei," No. 35),

Not only during the offering of the sacrifice and the carrying out of the Sacrament, but also afterwards, while the Eucharist is kept in the churches and chapels, Christ is truly the Emmanuel, that is "God with us." Since he is with us day and night, he dwells with us full of grace and truth. . . . The Catholic Church professes this service of worship of the Eucharistic Sacrament not only during the Mass, but also beyond its celebration, by saving the consecrated bread with the maximum diligence, presenting it to the solemn veneration of the faithful Christians, carrying it in procession for the rejoicing of the Christian multitude.

In theory, these views of traditional Romanism (as opposed to modern controversial Catholic theology) are based on Jesus' words, *This is my body . . . this is my blood*. By these words Catholics officially believe that Jesus Himself worked, hence, sanctioned the miraculous transformation. That such a position cannot be sustained from the words of Christ, is proven by the following considerations:

1. After having said, *This is my body . . . this is my blood*, He referred to the *bread* as simply *bread* (I Cor. 11:26) and to the cup as "the fruit of the vine," (26:29; Mark 14:25), although both, according to the theory, should have already changed into flesh and blood. Paul, too, speaks of the supposedly transformed *bread* as simply *bread* two more times and calls the wine simply "the cup" three times, after citing the supposedly miraculously transforming words of Jesus (I Cor. 11:27ff.). Now, if neither Jesus nor Paul could discern any change in these elements, there must have not been any.
2. In the Catholic mass there is no transformation that can be discerned by the impartial observer, not even by the Pope himself (*Osservatore Romano* for 1-2 July 1968, p. 2). The wafer remains

what it is and the wine drunk by the priest is still wine. But calling it a "spiritual miracle" is inexcusable, because, when Jesus worked real miracles, tangibly verifiable changes occurred. When He turned water into wine, for example, everyone could tell that it was no longer water, but the finest wine (John 2:9f.). There was no need for ecclesiastical hocus-pocus nor mental gymnastics nor auto-suggestion to cause people to think a material change had taken place when it had not.

3. Such a miraculous transformation, in the nature of the case, is not to be expected from Christ. The Roman Catholic doctrine of the mass, established by the Council of Trent (canons 1 and 2 of the Decretal on the Eucharist, and sanctioned by Vatican II), affirms that the Eucharist is a propitiatory sacrifice that is offered to take away the sins of the living and dead in Christ. (Cf. *Documents of the Second Vatican Council*, "The Liturgy," §§ 9,354, 1288.) Thus, every mass becomes a repeated renewal of Christ's sacrifice, which shifts the believer's attention from the proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection to the pretended "mystery" of the mutation of the Eucharist's elements (*ibid.*, §§ 286, 1252-1254). But Christ's sacrifice was a unique event: once for ever (Rom. 6:9f.; Heb. 7:25-27; 9:22, 25-28; 10:12-14)! Thus, the supposed necessity of other, repeated, complementary sacrifices of Christ's body and blood to remove sins, is diametrically opposed to the Bible doctrine of the uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ's original sacrifice (Heb. 10:17f).
4. Such an interpretation turns into wooden, prosaic literalism the figurative language of a Teacher whose lessons abound in vivid pictures. *This is my body . . . my blood* are simply metaphors, that vivid figure of speech which creates a relationship between two objects by calling one of them by a term that denotes the characteristic of the other, thus, rhetorically transferring the characteristic of the one to the other so as to suggest some analogy between them. While many illustrations could be cited (like John 10:7, 9; 14:6; 15:1; I Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Matt. 5:13-16; Jer. 2:13; Gen. 49:9, 14, 21, 22, 27), the one which shows most convincingly that Jesus' language is to be understood figuratively is Luke's version: "This cup . . . is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20; cf. I Cor. 11:25). By affirming that "this cup" is a "new covenant," He brings together two otherwise unconnected ideas to make His point. This combination is simply another metaphor of

the same type utilized by Matthew and Mark's version: *This is my body . . . my blood*. At any rate, Jesus warned against turning metaphor into literalism with precise reference to His body and His blood, when He cautioned so emphatically, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63).

5. The disciples themselves understood Jesus to speak symbolically, because no serious objection arose from these Hebrews against the cannibalism implicitly involved in eating real human flesh and drinking real human blood, for to them this could not be less than totally abhorrent. (Contrast the unbelievers, who, like the traditional, Catholic position, thought Jesus spoke literally, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" John 6:52!)
6. Possibly utilizing the ancient formula of Exodus 12:11, at the Passover Hebrews spoke of the Passover lamb thus: "This *is* the body of the lamb which our fathers ate in Egypt." (Cf. Edersheim, *Temple*, 232, who documents a similar statement in Mishnah, *Pes.* 10.3.) Although it was decidedly not the same lamb, each Passover lamb stood for and memorialized it.
7. We present a photograph to our acquaintances, saying, "This is my mother," knowing that they cannot misunderstand us to affirm that the picture itself is our parent. Similarly, while alive in their presence, Jesus could even more easily hand them bread and wine and affirm, *This is my body . . . my blood*, without their misunderstanding Him to mean that some metaphysical change had come over those common elements which even their own senses could not discern, but which Jesus continued to speak of as bread and wine.

Therefore, certain knowledge not only of this text but also of Jesus' general use of metaphors and of His style of Kingdom, as well as genuine spiritual discernment are all needed to restrain us from repeating the sacramental substitution of the Church's Dark Ages. Those men, unwilling to believe that the spiritual influence of the Supper lay in mere symbols, attributed to the figure all the powerful virtue of the things symbolized, transferring the power of salvation from Jesus the Savior to the sacrifice of the mass. But salvation cannot be acquired through the magical properties of earthly elements, but by a new standing before God, a position determined by personal faith in Jesus Christ and attained by His self-sacrifice once for all forever. The certainty that we truly and

properly partake of Christ is not made possible as the result of an ecclesiastical magic trick accomplished only by authorized personnel (which also shifts attention to a special priestly hierarchy). Rather, this certainly is obtained by the willing confession that all who eat His flesh and drink His blood in the sense that HE expressed, that is, by absorbing His words, His Spirit and His life, have His life abiding in them (John 6:53-63).

This supposed miraculous change only occurs because of the sacerdotal authority of the priest, hence the attention of the participant is directed toward celebrating the glories of the sacerdotal hierarchy while he concentrates on that imaginary miracle performed thereby. Thus, the conscience of the worshipper is gradually drawn away from the Gospel emphasis to an obsession with human mediation and a god in the box, the consecrated wafer in the Tabernacle. The most negative effect of this belief is its emphasis on a daily miracle created by priestly power, while the power of a Christ risen to die no more is relegated to an event in the dusty past, remembered once a year at Easter.

That not even all Catholicism is agreed on the transubstantiation dogma is evidenced in all the Catholic theologians' struggles to oppose it especially before Vatican II. The Pope's stern rebukes of Catholics who oppose the doctrine, measure the magnitude of lower-level dissent among progressive Catholics (Encyclica "Mysterium fidei," No. 4). Let us hope that the new Catholic theology be able to free itself from the official dogmatics of the past which had nothing to do with the Bible and were useless to strengthen the faith, and that they might proceed more swiftly and freely on the road toward a return to God's Word.

#### Undaunted confidence in the future

**26:29 But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.** This declaration stands in astonishing contrast (*légo dè humîn*) with what, to His disciples, must have seemed inexplicable pessimism. But Jesus intends to infuse into them His own unshakable confidence in His final victory. After picturing His death in the symbols of bread and wine, He now lays before them a stunning challenge: "I have just talked about my death, but now I promise

you that the long-awaited Messianic Kingdom of God will have come on earth before another Passover rolls around! Dare you believe *that*? This year I drink this cup of Passover wine, part of the old, Mosaic economy. Next year we will drink together in an entirely new way *in the Kingdom!*"

His words, however, must not be mistaken for a somber refusal to drink, as if, by a supposed Nazarite vow of abstinence, He were consecrating Himself for the imminent sacrifice of His life. Nor is there any indication that He were fasting, rather than participating in the Passover. *I shall not drink henceforth* implies, without distinctly affirming it, "I have drunk up to now." It is *henceforth*, i.e. from now on, that the change would come. Otherwise, the disciples must wonder why, of all people, Jesus alone did not participate with them in the Passover in the normal way. But of His non-participation there is not a word in Scripture. That He neither ate nor drank is a hypothesis contrary to His strong desire expressly declared (Luke 22:15f.). In fact, *henceforth* (*ap'arti*) . . . *until* (*héos*) means that He ate the Passover meal, but this is absolutely the last time to do so under these conditions. From this Passover feast forward, He would not participate in such a festal celebration until it could be shared with His people in a new way *in the Kingdom*. Thus, He says farewell to the Passover, and consequently, to the Mosaic dispensation founded on it. Edersheim (*Temple*, 233f. with bracketed additions from his *Life*, II,492) described the Passover as specially suited to typify Christ and end with His death:

It was a sacrifice, and yet quite out of the order of all Levitical sacrifices [and distinct from all others]. For it had been instituted and observed before Levitical sacrifices existed; before the Law was given; nay, before the Covenant was ratified by blood (Ex. 24). In a sense, it may be said to have been the cause and foundation of all the later sacrifices of the Law, and of the Covenant itself. Lastly, it belonged neither to one nor to another class of sacrifices; it was neither exactly a sin-offering nor a peace-offering, but combined them both. And yet in many respects it quite differed from them. In short, just as the priesthood of Christ was a real Old Testament priesthood, yet not after the order of Aaron, but after the earlier, prophetic, and royal order of Melchisedek, so the sacrifice of Christ was a real Old Testament sacrifice, yet not after the order of the Levitical sacrifices, but after that of the earlier prophetic Passover sacrifice by which Israel had become a royal nation.

No wonder, then, that Jesus should make a definite break with the Mosaic institution once the completion of His own mission should bring it to final fulfillment. It is this finality that causes this particular Passover to be called "the Last Supper." But the break is not so radical that He must be seen as refusing to participate in the last Hebrew Passover. *This fruit of the vine* means "this Passover wine" (Luke 22:15-18), because not only had Jesus given the wine new meaning, but now categorically affirms that He would nevermore taste it until this new meaning had been realized in the Kingdom. On the question of wine versus grape juice, see below. He cannot mean He would nevermore eat common meals with the disciples before the Ascension (Acts 10:41). The fact remains, therefore, that for Jesus the cup still contained simple *fruit of the vine*, not blood, even after referring to it as His "blood."

*Until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.* Did Jesus see the Last Supper as a prelude to the great Messianic or to the Lord's Supper, or both?

1. THE MESSIANIC BANQUET (8:11f. = Luke 13:28f.; 14:15ff.). *That day in my Father's kingdom* has an eschatological ring to it, since *that day* commonly points to some great day of the Lord. (Cf. Isa. 10:20, 27; Hosea 1:5; Amos 9:11; Zech. 12:3-11; 13:2, 4; 14:4-21; Matt. 24:36; Luke 21:34; I Thess. 5:4; cf. 5:2; II Thess. 1:10; II Tim. 1:18; 4:8.) Further, even in Matthew the Christian era is distinguished from the eternal Kingdom (5:10?; 13:43; 25:34 as opposed to 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 12:28; 13:11, 19, 24, 31, 33, 44-47; 16:19, 28, etc.). And in that realm of eternity we may anticipate full, uninterrupted, unsullied, restored fellowship with the Lord. (Cf. I Thess. 4:17; Rev. 3:20?; 7:14ff.; 19:9; 2:1-4.) Not only does this supper commemorate; it anticipates, looking backward to the cross and forward to our future celestial fellowship. Our present, earthly communion is not mortal like our bodies, but has a joyous, eternal future. We celebrate in hope of that grand reunion with our Lord in His eternal Kingdom.
  - a. But the true eschatological fellowship with the Lord cannot exclude all fellowship with Jesus now or be thought to be postponed until the Lord's Supper find its heavenly fulfillment in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. This view discounts the high importance Jesus attributes to His real fellowship with His Church on earth now (cf. 18:20).
  - b. *In my Father's kingdom* may rightly be thought parallel to Luke's expressions "until the Kingdom of God comes . . . until

it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16, 18). These are similar in thought to Luke 9:27 (= Matt. 16:28 = Mark 9:1) and refer, not to the post-judgment eschatological Kingdom, but to the Kingdom of Christ which began during the lifetime of the early Christians, i.e. the Church.

- c. Certainly, we proclaim His death "until He comes again" (I Cor. 11:26), but to suppose that His promise refers exclusively to the great Marriage Supper of the Lamb, is to minimize the present participations of all living saints *in the Kingdom*.
2. THE LORD'S SUPPER. Jesus officiated at the last Passover supper ever truly celebrated according to God's will. That very next day at three o'clock in the afternoon,—at the hour of prayer and the offering of the last daily sacrifice (cf. Acts 3:1; Mark 15:34)—the Passover was fulfilled when the Lamb of God was sacrificed (I Cor. 5:7; Col. 2:14). The following Pentecost the Kingdom of God was fully inaugurated on earth and the new covenant executed. From that date on, Jesus began to have communion with His disciples *in the kingdom* as it is now in anticipation of the Messianic banquet in the eternal Kingdom. So, even now the eschatological fellowship with the Lord may be ours in foretaste and promise at His Table. Even now, therefore, Jesus communes with His own (18:20; I Cor. 10:16). He is not content to be without us at His table where He is Master Host and our Fellow-banqueter. So, there is joyful optimism in His promise: *I shall . . . drink it new with you in the Kingdom*. How this prospect inspires us to be at that Table, meeting Him there as the Church to have fellowship with Him!

### FRUIT OF THE VINE: WINE OR GRAPE JUICE?

Would first-century Hebrews ask this question? Or, is not this a query typical of a sympathy for a dogmatic position of total abstinence, rather than temperance, toward all forms of alcohol? (See author's study: "Should Jesus Drink Wine?" my vol. II, 526ff.)

The question of wine versus grape juice does not revolve around whether grape juice were available in the spring at Passover time or whether Jews anciently used hermetic sealing methods to prevent it from spoiling or fermenting. The question is what they did, when both wine and grape juice were available.

*Fruit of the vine*, as Jewish sources reveal, is but a beautiful paraphrase for wine. (See Davis, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 818ff., where Mishnah *Berakoth* 6:1 is cited; *I.S.B.E.* art. "Wine," 3086ff.; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, V, art. *oīnos*, 163.167; also I, art. *génema tês ampèlou*, 684.) According to the Mishnah, *Pes.* 2, fermented drinks of grain that had had contact with the yeast of bread were forbidden. Edersheim (*Life* II,485) contends that "the wine was the ordinary one of the country, only red; it was mixed with water, generally in the proportion of one part to two of water." To this he appends the footnote: "The contention that it was *unfermented* wine is not worth serious discussion, although in *modern* practice (for reasons needless to mention) its use is allowed." He cites the Jerusalem *Pes* 37c as indicating that each of the Paschal cups generally contained only about 94 grams (or 3 ounces) of watered-down wine. By the end of the traditional four cups, if the wine were diluted to half water, the most alcohol anyone would have drunk would be about 11-12% of a third of a liter (or about 1.4 oz.)! Today, normal Jewish table-wine straight from Israel, labelled "Pure for Passover" (*kosher le Pesach*), is 11-12% alcohol.

The argument that the *fermentation* of wine, as opposed to unfermented grape juice, would disqualify wine for use on the Passover Supper, assumes that Jewish authorities considered such fermentation to be equal to leaven or yeast. This view, however, does not accurately reflect Biblical logic. The fermentation of wine was obviously not considered "leaven," since wine could be poured out as a libation on God's altar during a burnt-offering (Exod. 29:39-41; Lev. 23:13; Num. 28:7f.), whereas no leaven must ever appear there (Exod. 23:18; Lev. 2:11). (Only when offerings were to be eaten by priests, Lev. 7:12ff., or by other, Lev. 7:16ff., could yeast be allowed with offerings. Cf. Lev. 23:15-20.)

McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 658) decides,

The word "wine" is nowhere used in any of the accounts of the Lord's Supper, the terms "cup" and "fruit of the vine" being employed in its stead. Those, therefore, who choose to use unfermented grape juice are guilty of no irregularity.

However, such brethren usually also insist that the original type of Passover bread, i.e. Mazzoth, or unleavened bread, be restored in

the Church's faith and practice. Would not consistency demand that they respect Jewish Passover practice in their "fruit of the vine" as much as their "unleavened bread"?

Then, are those who use grape juice sinning, because they do not use Passover wine along with Mazzoth (unleavened bread)? While the unfermented grape juice they drink in the Lord's Supper is probably not what Jesus distributed among His disciples, nevertheless, their conscience is weak due to their acceptance of total abstinence taught for Christian doctrine (despite Col. 2:16-25). So, they cannot change until they be convinced of the Scriptural validity of using wine. To change without conviction is sin (Rom. 14:23). However, until they are persuaded, they must never condemn their brothers who use wine with understanding and Scriptural bases. Similarly, their wine-drinking brothers must not sneer at their abstaining brothers' conscience against using wine.

### THE LORD'S SUPPER, A PERMANENT INSTITUTION

That Jesus intended a perpetual observance of His Supper is suggested in His plea: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; I Cor. 11:24f.). Paul points to the only appropriate termination of our participation: "until He comes" (I Cor. 11:26). Although no specific rule determines the frequency of participation, our love for Jesus is our highest norm. Subsequent early Christian practice illustrates their understanding that Jesus expected His Church to observe it perpetually (Acts 2:42, 46?; 20:7; cf. Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, Chap. VI).

Logically, by virtue of our continued need to feast our souls on Christ Himself, the Lord's Supper would be a continuous reminder of our dependence on Him and on the terms of the covenant under which our forgiveness is secured. The question, "How often should we observe the Supper?" is thus already answered in a non-legalistic way: "No more than you need to be reminded of the cost of your salvation, no oftener than you need to express your dependence on Jesus, no more regularly than you need forgiveness for your violation of the covenantal terms of your relationship with God, no oftener

than you need to meditate on your responsibility to the whole Body of Christ, the 'many' for whom this sacrifice was made." Therefore, observance of the Supper every week could never be too often for those who are spiritually sensitive to these needs. From this point of view, then, every Lord's Day may not be enough, but merely the accepted minimum for the local assembly of Christians to be able to get together.

Edersheim (*Life*, II,491) saw the symmetry in Jesus' ministry as it relates to us:

With a sacrament did Jesus begin His Ministry: it was that of separation and consecration in Baptism. With a second Sacrament did He close His Ministry: it was that of gathering together and fellowship in the Lord's Supper. Both were into His Death: yet not as something that had power over Him, but as a death that has been followed by the Resurrection. For, if in Baptism we are buried with Him, we also rise with Him; and if in the Holy Supper we remember His Death, it is as that of Him Who is risen again—and if we show forth that Death, it is until He come again. And so this Supper, also, points forward to the Great Supper at the final consummation of His Kingdom.

### God's son defies with a triumphant song

**26:30 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.** Much preceded this *hymn* that Matthew does not report. John penned the fuller account of those last, precious hours with the Eleven during which Jesus unburdened His heart in a discourse that forms the content of John 13:31—17:26. Although John 14:30 reports Jesus' order, "Rise, let us leave here," they may have stood up to go, but lingered further in the Upper Room, while Jesus continued His instruction, His intercessory prayer, and finally this *hymn*.

As a translation of Matthew's words, the phrase, *when they had sung a hymn*, is misleading, because it points to a single *hymn*, whereas Matthew wrote *humnésantes*: "they having sung hymns or having hymned." This aorist participle does not specify how many hymns

they sang or for how long, but merely views the action as an event. It was traditional to bring the Passover celebration to a close by singing Psalms 115-118. It is not necessary to treat these Psalms together as a bloc to be sung together as one *hymn*. So, they could well have sung these Psalms. Edersheim (*Life*, II,488) affirmed that, during the actual slaying of the Paschal lambs in the Temple, while the blood was being applied to the altar, the Levites led the worshipers in chanting Psalms 113-118. This repeated Psalm-singing vividly brought the slaying of the Paschal lamb right into the Passover supper itself. Sometimes also Psalms 120-137 were sung at the close of the feast (Edersheim, *Temple*, 244, note 2).

The original precept required, "Not one of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning" (Exod. 12:22). That *they went out*, rather than remain in the Upper Room, cannot be cited as proof that Jesus did not participate in the truly Last Passover. The Jews in Palestine distinguished the characteristics of the original "Egyptian Passover" from those of the permanent institution, since some of the former were considered out of harmony with the true meaning of the Passover, once Israel arrived in the Promised Land. These features were not to be considered an essential part of the ordinance itself. So, as was His custom (Luke 22:39) every night during His Last Week (Luke 21:37), He left the City.

*They went out to the mount of Olives.* Leaving the Upper Room they started walking through the dark streets of the City toward their specific destination, the Garden of Gethsemane. This ended Jesus' privacy, because He was aware that Judas knew His habits well enough to predict He might eventually make this move (John 18:2).

So, after singing of the victory over sin and death, of zeal for the glory of God, of the joy of service to God, of the goodness of God in all of its manifestations, Jesus went out to Gethsemane and the cross, SINGING, "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever" (Ps. 118:29). How could He SING with the doom of divine judgment and human infamy awaiting Him just a few hours later? In those Psalms He sang of consecration to God, calm truthfulness and fortitude in trial. Because Jesus SANG, we too can sing, even if our eyes and hours are now washed with tears.

For a rich spiritual experience, why not turn to Psalms 113-118 and read those great songs aloud, as if you stood with Jesus and the Eleven in the Upper Room, knowing what He knew about the coming cross? What thoughts go through your mind as you contemplate the

cross through the language of those Psalms? What must Jesus have thought about? How do these Psalms calm your troubled soul, as you too say, "The LORD is my strength and MY SONG"? Or, "The LORD is with me: I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Cf. Heb. 13:6.)

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. List five ways the Scriptures use the term "Passover."
2. During the Last Week did Jesus eat the regular passover meal at the normal time? What texts show whether He did or not?
3. On what day of the week did Jesus eat the passover meal? Prove your answer.
4. Identify "the first day of unleavened bread": Why call it by this title? What was its function? What two major preparations did the Jews usually make on this day? How do the Synoptics distinguish this day from "the day of preparation?"
5. What does Jesus mean by the expression, "My time is at hand"?
6. What specific arrangements would normally be needed to be made for Jesus and His men to eat the Passover?
7. Name the two disciples commissioned to make the arrangements.
8. How were these two disciples instructed to proceed from the moment they left Jesus to make the arrangements?
9. Why did Jesus eat the Passover in the evening?
10. When, precisely, did Jesus point out Judas as the traitor? List the various events at the supper in order to show this moment.
11. How did Jesus indicate the traitor to be Judas?
12. How did Jesus hide the betrayer's identity until his departure from the Upper Room?
13. How did the other Apostles react to Jesus' announcement that one of them would betray Him?
14. Quote the text wherein Jesus absolved God of all responsibility for Judas' betrayal and contemporaneously established Judas' complete freedom of choice.
15. At what general point in the Passover did Jesus institute the Lord's Supper?
16. What was the original symbolism of the unleavened bread in the Passover?
17. Name the figure of speech involved in the expression: "This is my body . . . my blood," then explain how Jesus' words are to be understood.

18. Explain how blood and covenants are connected in the plan of God, then apply this understanding to Jesus' use of these terms in connection with forgiveness of sins.
19. Jesus said, "I shall . . . drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." To what astounding reality does this promise point?
20. Were Jesus and His disciples accustomed to sing a hymn in connection with Passover? If so, what hymn was it?
21. What does the Lord's Supper say to the participant about the purpose of Jesus' death?
22. Show the meaning(s) of the Lord's Supper by quoting passages of Scripture that state or imply its meaning.

## SECTION 66

### JESUS PREDICTS PETER'S DENIALS AND OTHERS' FAILURE

(Parallels: Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-38; John 13:31-38)

TEXT: 26:31-35

31 Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended in me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. 32 But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee. 33 But Peter answered and said unto him, If all shall be offended in thee, I will never be offended. 34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. 35 Peter said unto him, Even if I must die with thee, *yet* will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you think Jesus announced the disciples' failure ahead of time? Would not this tend to discourage them from doing better? What specific advantage(s) did He seek, by giving them this advance notice?
- b. What does it mean for someone to "be offended in" Jesus?
- c. Why did Jesus inform the disciples that, "After I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee"? How could the anticipation of His return to Galilee do anything for them in their bewildered state?

- d. Do you think Peter heard Jesus' clear reference to His resurrection and anticipated return to Galilee? What makes you think so?
- e. What combination of traits caused Peter to deny the possibility of his failure? Why did Peter react this way? How does his reaction to Jesus' warnings differ from that of Judas when the latter was faced with Jesus' predictions of his betrayal?
- f. Why do you think Jesus predicted Peter's denials? to show Peter how wrong he was? to show Himself omniscient? or something else?
- g. In what ironic way did the disciples practically deny their discipleship by their vigorous protests of unswerving faithfulness?
- h. Jesus predicted Peter's denials would occur in connection with a cock's crowing. What does this tell you about the time intended? What does it tell you about Jesus?
- i. Luke says "this day" whereas Matthew says "this very night" Peter would deny the Lord. How would you resolve this apparent contradiction?
- j. On the basis of this incident what may we learn about: (1) Satan and temptation? (2) the weakness of human nature, even in disciples? (3) Jesus?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"Tonight," Jesus said to His men, "you will all feel deeply shocked because of me. In fact, the Scriptures say, 'I [God] will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of his flock will be scattered.' However, after my resurrection from the dead, I will be back in Galilee before you are!"

To this, Peter protested, "Even if everyone else stumbles and loses faith in you, I will never desert you!"

Jesus demurred, "I solemnly assure you—yes, you Peter, today, in fact this very night, even before the rooster crows twice, will disown me three times!"

But Peter protested even more vehemently, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you!"

All the other disciples kept saying the same thing.

### SUMMARY

In harmony with Zechariah's prophecy, Jesus warned the Twelve that they would be deeply shocked because of Him. Impetuously,

Peter refused to accept this possibility and led the others to affirm their undying loyalty, despite Jesus' predictions of their failure.

## NOTES

### Deserters unanimous

26:31 **Then saith Jesus unto them. All ye shall be offended in me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.** *Then*, as they were leaving the City to make their way toward the Mount of Olives. The following warning is probably not the first. Rather, as Luke (23:31ff.) and John (13:36-38) indicate, Jesus broached the subject with Peter while still in the Upper Room, distinctly predicting his failure. Now, because of the rapid approach of their break-down in courage, the Lord repeats His warning, first generalizing it to include everyone, then specifying Peter's denials again.

That two separate warnings could occur and be followed by two distinct protestations of faithfulness is psychologically possible both for Jesus and for Peter as also for the others. During the washing of the disciples' feet, several arguments were required before Peter genuinely acquiesced. Since the disciples remained so naive as to their own strength under fire and so unbelieving as to His rapidly approaching suffering, Jesus must bring them back to reality in the hope of saving them from their not inevitable cowardliness. But His repeating this prediction would undoubtedly result in the repetition of the same bad scene Peter played earlier, with the difference that now the others second his vehement objections.

*All ye:* was there to be no one left faithfully brave until the end? At first "all deserted Him and fled" every man for himself (26:56). However, John boldly infiltrated the arresting contingent and succeeded in entering the palace of the high priest himself and later procured Peter's admission too (John 18:15ff.). *Shall be offended in me:* Earlier (11:6), Jesus had challenged John the Baptist to believe Him without wavering due to his personal concepts of what the Messiah had to be. Now the meaning of His strange Beatitude touched His men personally. The personal prejudices of the Twelve would leave them exposed to extreme psychological shock when they saw their Lord tied and dragged away to the slaughter like a common criminal. Even though He had revealed it many times before, they had not the faith to see Him as God's Lamb taking away the sins of the world.

They could not interpret the arrest and trials as minor incidents on His way to the Throne at the center of the moral universe by the only route that could take Him there (Rev. 5). *This night*: The relative calm with which they had enjoyed the Passover supper and Jesus' subsequent instruction and prayer must not disguise the suddenness and fury of the tempest that would break around them within a few hours.

*All ye shall be offended in me this night.* This important text sharpens our understanding of what it means to cause others to stumble. Jesus clearly warned His men that *He Himself* would be the cause of stumbling for them. However, *He did not swerve from His path of duty to accommodate their scruples and points of view that were the true cause of their shock.* He had done everything in His power to correct their misapprehensions and misguided expectations as to His kingly Messiahship. Their minds remained largely unchanged. Now, however, He must do the will of God, even if His conduct caused them to stumble. (Cf. Paul's refusal to circumcise Titus because of Christian's prejudices and his circumcising of Timothy because of Jewish feelings. Gal. 2:1-5; Acts 16:3 in the context of Acts 15! Paul continued to proclaim the Gospel, even though it was scandal to the Jews. I Cor. 1:23.) This understanding frees us from guilt when we do proclaim the will of God and, to our chagrin and deeply-felt anguish, cause hard-headed, unconvincible people to declare themselves scandalized. It does not, of course, exonerate us from that gentle sensitivity that seeks to protect the weak conscience of the ignorant (I Cor. 8:7). It does free us from slavery to the opinionated who would impose their prejudices on believers. (See notes on 26:10.)

He must awaken His much-loved companions to their vulnerability. To see Jesus overpowered by His foes would severely tempt them to question whether He were God's Anointed or not.

1. To steel them for the blow soon to strike them, He predicted their downfall. This pessimistic outlook counselled them to take appropriate measures to resist the shock. His meek, voluntary surrender to His enemies must not come upon them unexpected.
2. But because they would desert Him anyway, He must point to the way back from their debacle. So doing, they would not drown in despair, because He Himself will have already shown them His forgiving spirit. That He foresaw everything and still did not reject them, warms them with His love, leaving them the hope, hence, the power to repent and repair the damage of their desertion.

3. The knowledge that the Scriptures too had foreseen their failure would actually rebuild their sagging faith and rekindle their courage, because, if the Scriptures were right about their failure, the Bible could be trusted about their ultimate victory too and dependable to lead the stunned disciples back to reasonableness and faith.

*I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad* (Zech. 13:7). *I will smite* is a free quotation from the Hebrew, since the Hebrews imperative ("Strike the shepherd") is reworded as a simple future, changing from God who orders the striking, into the one who does it. What one does by means of an agent may correctly be said to have done for himself. The result of this alteration is to affirm even more clearly that God is in full control of the events, even if it would appear that evil men are authors of what must appear to the disciples as inexplicable chaos surrounding Jesus' death. History is in God's hands, so everything will proceed according to His design, even if men cannot understand or accept it. Pointing to Isaiah, Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 913) justifies Jesus' rewording:

It was Jehovah himself who 'laid upon' the Mediator 'all our iniquities' (Isa. 53:6). It was he who 'struck him down, "bruised him," put him to grief,' 'made his soul an offering for sin.' . . . It was God the Father who 'spared not his own Son' (Rom. 8:32).

That the smitten *shepherd* in question is the Messiah, is amply sustained by an examination of Zechariah's larger context (Zech. 9-13). The King who came to Israel meek and riding on an ass (Zech. 9:9) is the Shepherd they detested and priced at 30 pieces of silver (11:12f.), the one who was pierced (12:10ff.) in whose day a fountain of cleansing from sin and impurity would be opened (13:1). Most convincing is the identification of "my *shepherd*" as the direct companion of the Lord Almighty (Zech. 13:7a).

#### Family reunion in Galilee

**26:32 But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee.** Whatever else this promise means, it sings of Jesus' forgiveness for their foreseeable desertion. He thus empowers them to recover themselves, believing that their cowardly unbelief was not beyond help or hope. "Though you desert me, I will not desert you." When they later reflected on their bad showing and His loving warning, they would be stronger and able to gather around Him once again.

*I will go before you (proàxo humàs)*, just as would a Shepherd (John 10:4). This touch is reminiscent of the second part of Zechariah's prophecy whereby those who survived the severe trials God would bring upon them would belong to Him in the closest fellowship imaginable (Zech. 13:7b-9).

*I will go before you into Galilee* suggests three things:

1. They would naturally return to Galilee after the feast, because it was home, but this time, instead of slinking ashamedly back to their homes like beaten men, they would return with high heads and singing hearts, as old friends to a long-awaited rendezvous. Jesus deliberately gave them an appointment to meet their risen Lord as a hope to steady them during the emotional earthquake of the cross. (Cf. 28:15; John 21 and possibly I Cor. 15:6?).
2. Why *Galilee*? Because it was home for Jesus too. With stunning cheerfulness in the face of impending disaster, He challenged them to believe that He Himself would enjoy that comforting joy of returning home among the loved and familiar before they would. It was as if He said, "Don't let the intervening crisis shake you so: I'll be back home in Galilee before you are!"
3. Did He prefer Galilee because the area around Jerusalem in Judea would be too turbulent to permit calm teaching after the resurrection and in consequence of it? (Cf. Acts 1:3; 10:40, 41.)

Why didn't Jesus mention also His appearances to them at various times in and around Jerusalem first on the very day of the resurrection? The point here is that He encourages them to believe that, despite the shock, sadness and horror of the crucifixion and entombment, the time would come when they would all walk together in the fresh air and sunlight of Galilean springtime as truly as they had done in happy days gone by. Just when they were crushed by their own unbelief and timidity, He rallies them with thoughts of home!

### The grave danger of self-confidence

**26:33 But Peter answered and said unto him, If all shall be offended in thee, I will never be offended.** Just as Peter took the initiative to confess Jesus as Lord, he impetuously pledges his loyalty. And just as before, he launches an entirely unjustified protest against Jesus' revelations (16:22). When Jesus Christ says something, no disciple has any right to object, demur or protest, because, even when Jesus puts

our loyalty in doubt, to disagree with Him is to prove Him absolutely correct in His evaluation! So, why did Peter protest so?

1. He was *prejudiced*. If he intended to cheer Jesus out of what must have seemed to him a dark, despondent mood, then it only proves how far he rejected the divine necessity of Jesus' death and to what extent the scandal of the cross menaced him personally. Peter would fail because his expectations of what Jesus would do when confronted by death were false. Peter could not foresee,—nor if told, accept—, the drastically changed conditions into which Jesus was even then moving. Like anyone else, he assumed that everything would go on as normal, Jesus would conquer all opposition and tomorrow would be another day like this. Hence, neither he nor the others could imagine what they must soon undergo. Nothing could be the same, because Jesus' hour had now finally come.
2. His overconfidence is grounded in his *self-reliance*. Of all men could he alone survive the avalanche of temptations that would bury all others? Although to be shocked at Jesus is not equal to betraying Him, yet it is no cause for bragging about one's faithfulness. What overconfidence and presumption to believe himself alone able to surpass the loyalty of everyone else! Only blind self-conceit kept him from confessing his own weakness and dependence upon God's grace. Earlier, along with the others, he had asked in severe self-examination, "Lord, is it I?" Now, however, he considers himself above the fears of common mortals. *Though they all fall away . . . I will never.*

In these horrified reactions of a zealous disciple whose loyalty has just been questioned, Alford (I,270) sees evidence that the following warning is not the first Jesus had given Peter. Hence, the warnings sounded in Luke 22:31-34 and John 13:36f. had possibly occurred before. He argues that Peter's anguished disjoining himself from the others so as to distinguish the level of his faithfulness above the rest, suggests that this is not the first time his reliability has been questioned that night. This explains his growing vehemence.

#### Cowardice in the crisis

**26:34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crows, thou shalt deny me thrice.** Although the fisherman-Apostle was self-convinced that he must succeed better

than he understood himself, must inform him that he would do worse. Peter committed the common fallacy of trusting a heart unsustained by grace: his own. Peter had boasted, "Never!" but Jesus warns, *This night, before the cock crows*. Peter had said, "Not I!" Jesus retorted, *You!* Peter protested, "Not once!" but Jesus specifies, *Three times*. Not by hasty, thoughtless speech, but deliberately, hence with aggravated responsibility.

*This night*: although Luke (22:34) has "this day," there is no contradiction, because "this day" had already begun with sunset, therefore at the beginning of *this night*. Mark (14:30) reports both of these expressions together (*sémeron taùte tê nuktì*).

*Before the cock crows*. Where Matthew, Luke and John imply that Peter would deny the Lord before the rooster crowed even once, Mark's citation states "before the cock crows twice." This implies that the cock would crow, then Peter would deny the Lord, then the cock would crow a second time. Several explanations have been given:

1. The first cock crow might have occurred around midnight, the second about three or four o'clock in the morning. Between the two the denials would occur. Most people in a profound sleep at midnight would not hear the first cock and so would consider the second one as the first, whereas there were literally two. Problem: why did not Peter hear this first cock and be reminded of Jesus' words and repent?
2. Before the cock would have had opportunity to crow twice, Peter would have denied the Lord. Further, the night was divided into various watches (cf. 24:43; 14:25), one of which was nick-named "the cock-crowing" (cf. Mark 13:35 *alektorofonias*). In this way Jesus indicated the approximate hour of the denials. The pre-dawn stillness of the city would permit anyone awake to hear the rooster, making this a particularly precise signal to Peter.

Consider the high wisdom of Jesus: He planted in Peter's mind the very signal that would be the means of pricking the man's conscience at the appropriate moment and save him. However, who but a true Prophet could foresee that *this* humble fowl would crow at the right time and stab the moral sense of the fallen Apostle? This is the third time an animal would speak to Peter of Jesus' control over nature. (Cf. Luke 5:1-11; Matt. 17:27; cf. II Peter 2:16.) And yet, the precision with which Jesus predicted Peter's denial neither persuaded him nor dissuaded him from confidently depending on his own strength.

Imagine his shock when he heard that cock lustily crowing out the literal fulfillment of Jesus' solemn prediction! (For the fulfillment, see on 26:74.)

### Lavish, impossible promises

**26:35 Peter saith unto him, Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.** Stubbornly, Peter continued insisting both emphatically and excessively (Mark 14:31). Unquestionably, this warm-hearted man means what he says, because true love is genuinely hurt to hear its sincerity put in doubt. Further, Jesus' astonishing predictions must have seemed absolutely incredible to him. Only the sad fulfillment of the prediction would finally convince him of Jesus' accuracy.

*Even if I must die with thee* accurately measures the strength of the temptation. He admits death's power to question one's willingness to abandon his integrity at the cost of his life. Peter's bold affirmations, however, are not made while looking death in the face. Too easily he, and all the others with him, suppose themselves capable of doing anything. Too readily they feel offended when informed that they cannot do it and that their good intentions are no substitute for facts. But without the power and grace of the Spirit, without Jesus, what could they do (John 15:3, 5)? Earlier (John 13:38), Jesus questioned Peter's ability to surrender his life for His sake. Still the man continues to consider himself equal to his Master, not knowing, as does Jesus, "with what reluctance and struggle a life is laid down, and what a hard task it is to die. . . . His Master Himself struggled when it came to this, and *the disciple is not greater than his Lord*" (Matthew Henry, V,1106).

*Likewise also said all the disciples.* Earlier, when Jesus spoke of Peter's denials, the others, who believed Peter as solid a disciple as anyone, must have been astounded but remained silent at this disclosure of his weakness, since they themselves were not involved. Now, however, when Jesus repeated the puzzling prediction, implicating them too, they join Peter's fervent protest by ardently reaffirming their own undying loyalty. However, people are least prepared morally when—and precisely because—they believe themselves most incapable of failure. (Cf. I Cor. 10:12.) Believing themselves unable to betray Jesus, they feel themselves also safe against being shocked at anything He did or that happened to Him. All of them were unquestionably ready to follow Jesus in a patriotic power struggle for glory at

the head of the nation. This vision did not prepare them to walk in His footsteps down the footpath of humiliation and frailty. It was quite beyond them to welcome insults, scourging and death without being able to retaliate.

Although these sincere, earnest men immediately abandoned Jesus, just as He predicted, in later life, however, they heroically kept these inconsiderate promises. According to tradition, most did give their lives for Christ. John lived and served unflinchingly until a venerable age. But they triumphed not in their own strength, but in that of the Holy Spirit and by the grace of God, and not unlikely because of Jesus' pre-crisis admonitions here.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. When and where did Jesus predict the disciples' approaching failure: before they all left the Upper Room or after? Or both? Defend your answer.
2. Define the expression: "offended in me." What other texts help interpret it?
3. What prophecy (book, chapter and verse) predicted the scattering of the flock upon the overwhelming of the shepherd? Show how it rightly applies to Jesus and the disciples.
4. According to the above-mentioned prophecy, who would strike the shepherd in question? How would this feature serve to encourage the sheep to remove the despair from their souls?
5. In what picturesque way did Jesus guarantee the certainty of His victory over death?
6. What was Peter's reaction to Jesus' announcement?
7. How did Jesus treat Peter's reaction?
8. What was the reaction of all the other disciples?
9. What time of day is "cockcrowing"?

### SECTION 67

#### JESUS PRAYS IN GETHSEMANE

(Parallels: Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46)

TEXT: 26:36-46

36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto his disciples, Sit ye here, while I go yonder and pray.

37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and sore troubled. 38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; abide ye here, and watch with me. 39 And he went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt. 40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. 42 Again a second time he went away, and prayed, saying, My Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it, thy will be done. 43 And he came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44 And he left them again, and went away, and prayed a third time, saying again the same words. 45 Then cometh he to the disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Arise, let us be going; behold, he is at hand that betrayeth me.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think Jesus *needed* to go to Gethsemane? Could He not have remained in Jerusalem to pray just as well? Why go there, then?
- b. Why do you think Jesus set the disciples as sentinels to watch and pray?
- c. If Jesus knew that He had come to earth for precisely this hour, why do you think He prayed, in a sense, that the Father save Him from it? (Cf. Mark 14:35; John 12:27ff.)
- d. Why did that "cup not pass away," contrary to Jesus' request?
- e. Why do you think He requested the presence of Peter, James and John? (1) How would that help Him? (2) How would it help them?
- f. What does Jesus' falling on His face to pray indicate about His feelings?
- g. If Jesus always knew and did God's will (cf. John 8:29), why, if He suspected His suffering inevitable, did He request to be exempt therefrom? What good did He really believe praying might do?
- h. Why did the disciples keep falling asleep, despite the fact that Jesus requested that they stand watch with Him?

- i. In what sense would they have "entered into temptation," if they did not watch and pray? How does watching and praying keep one out of temptation?
- j. Is it true of us that "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"? What *should* we do about it? What *do* we do about it?
- k. Do you think it is ever right to pray the same prayer twice? What about using the very same words to repeat the prayer? Why do you say that?
- l. How do you think Jesus addressed the sleeping disciples, "Sleep on now, take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed . . ."? Was He angry, irritated, astonished, or what? What did He mean?
- m. Do you think Jesus' prayers were answered? If so, when or how?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then with His disciples Jesus went over the ravine of the Kedron, as He usually did, to a piece of land on the Mount of Olives where there was a garden called "Gethsemane" a word which means "the oil-press." When they arrived there, He told them, "Sit down here while I go over there and pray. Pray that you may not walk right into temptation."

Taking with Him Peter and Zebedee's sons, James and John, He began to show His grief and the deep dread He felt. Then He commented, "I am so completely overwhelmed with grief that I could die right here! Stay here and keep watch with me."

Walking on a bit further by Himself about a stone's throw away, He knelt down. Then He threw Himself face down on the ground and began praying, that, if it were possible, He might not have to face the impending ordeal. He kept saying, "My Father, if it be possible—everything is possible for You. . . . if you are willing, take this painful destiny away from me! However, it is not my will, but Yours, that must be done!"

[Then an angel from heaven appeared to Him, encouraging Him. Being deeply anguished, He prayed more urgently. His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground.] When He arose from praying, He returned to the disciples and found them sleeping, exhausted by sorrow.

"Simon," He addressed Peter, "are you asleep? Could you men not stand watch with me a single hour? Rise, stay awake and pray,

that you may not be unnecessarily exposed to temptation. Your spirit is certainly willing, but your human nature is frail."

Once more, for the second time, He went away to pray, repeating the same words, "My Father, since it is not possible for my destiny to be changed without my undergoing it, Your will must be done."

When He came back, He found them sleeping again, because they could not keep their eyes open. They did not know what excuse to give Him. So, leaving them again, He went back and prayed for the third time, uttering the same words. When He returned the third time to the disciples, He chided them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! Look, the time has come for me to be turned over to sinful men. Get up, let's get going! Look, here comes my betrayer now!"

### SUMMARY

At the gate of the garden Jesus left eight disciples so as to be able to pray relatively undisturbed. Taking with Him His "Inner Circle of Three," Peter, James and John, He urged them to stay awake and pray with Him during His intense crisis of soul. Leaving them, He walked deeper into the garden to pray that God's will might be done without the suffering. Nevertheless, He acquiesced and submitted Himself to accept God's choice. Three times He prayed this and three times He returned to find His men sleeping, not praying. Finally, He roused them once more to go to meet the foe.

### NOTES

#### THE TEMPTATIONS IN THE GARDEN

Many a man has defeated pleasure's allurements only to be broken on the wheel of pain and fear of death. Finding Jesus at His most vulnerable moment, Satan could perceive that his most favorable opportunity had returned. (Cf. Luke 4:13.) The temptation to deviate from the path of obedience and devotion to God was present in *this* garden no less than in the Garden of Eden. The devil could well sense that the destiny of mankind was to be decided in this garden no less than in the first. Contrast the methods and results of the first Adam with those of this last Adam. (Cf. I Cor. 15:22, 45.) It is not surprising, then, that Satan should be present with Jesus in Gethsemane no less than during the wilderness temptations. (Cf. John 14:30.)

## THE RIGHT WAY TO SUFFER FOR THE TRUTH

**26:36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto his disciples, Sit ye here, while I go yonder and pray.** On the western slope of the Mount of Olives across the Kedron Valley from Jerusalem was a piece of ground locally called *Gethsemane* which means "olive press." Since the entire hill was famous for its olives, a press would be needed to process them. Was this Jesus' usual camping place during the feast? (Cf. Luke 21:37.) If so, Judas could easily find it (John 18:1f.).

Upon arrival Jesus divided His men into two groups: eight to sit at the entrance and the other three to enter with Him deeper into the olive grove. Was this division to serve His own needs or that of the disciples? Would it have been too shocking for the eight to see His anguish? Or, did they serve as an early warning barrier against premature disturbance? Both groups were charged with the responsibility of praying so as not to fall into temptation (Luke 22:40).

*While I go yonder and pray:* Jesus Himself attacked His problems, not by anxious pondering or human reasoning, but on His knees. Coming away the Victor, He taught His men the road to triumph. (See Heb. 5:7-10 as Scripture commentary.) What a revelation of their overconfidence: they can sleep, prayerlessly oblivious to the danger. By contrast, the Son of God is so conscious of His own frailty under stress that He must approach temptation with nothing less than concentrated prayer! Jesus' true humanness was never clearer than when He expressed His felt need for prayer.

He set this physical distance between Him and them for one or more of the following reasons:

1. He expected no substantial help from them.
2. He believed their own susceptibility to shock so great that it would be better for them not to observe His struggles.
3. He desired intimacy with the Father which only the distance of isolation could offer.

### The loneliness of the struggle

**26:37. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and sore troubled.** Until now Jesus had spent all His energies encouraging and instructing the disciples so as not to burden them beyond their strength. Now, however, in the

privacy of the garden with only His inner Three present, He gave way to the deep dread He felt and *began to* express it as never before. These who had been privileged to witness His transfiguration glory (17:1) and His power over death (Luke 8:51; Mark 5:40) must now behold Him horror-stricken, filled with dread and intense emotional agony in the shadow of the cross.

*He took with him:* Although human companionship is not incompatible with seeking God's fellowship, He obviously felt a loneliness that no other human being could fully share. That He specifically selects these three out of a desire for human sympathy in the midst of suffering, points to a closeness of fellowship and affectionate understanding between the men chosen and Himself.

What are the starkly real temptations Jesus faced that night?

1. If in the wilderness temptations He was allured to end His bodily hunger by acting outside of God's will, could not His human sensitivity to pain recoil from submitting to the torture of crucifixion?
2. He could have called down heavenly fire to destroy all His enemies, indeed all men and cancelled our redemption as a bad idea. Were not the Father's heavenly legions instantly available at His word (26:53)? He could easily have been spared (26:53; John 19:11).
3. He could have taken advantage of the night shadows to flee from Jerusalem, taking refuge in some distant secret hermitage and living out His earthly life in relatively sweet tranquility.
4. He could have completely justified His refusal before any human court. What just human law would have sentenced the Innocent to die for the brutal wickedness and ingratitude of human unbelief?

### The fellowship of his suffering

26:38 **Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: abide ye here, and watch with me.** *My soul* = "I myself in the frailty of my human nature." In a true sense, His whole earthly life had been characterized as one "of sorrows and familiar with suffering," (Isa. 53), but now there is an intense concentration of His affliction. No longer could He say, "My hour is not yet come." Instead, He must now face being publicly branded as a false pretender to the dignity of Messiahship and brutalized as a common criminal. This epitomized His rejection by His own people, Israel. He faced also the shameful penalty for the sins of the whole world. *This* is the vision that overwhelmed Him with sorrow to the point

of death, almost as if He meant, "My spirit is so deeply burdened with sorrow it almost kills me!" If psychological anticipation of death can produce physiological conditions that bring about death, this may explain why God met His Sons's psychological need (Luke 22:43). This crushing agony of anticipation suffered in the garden may also explain why, when some victims of crucifixion linger for days, Jesus died so swiftly on the cross.

In simply coming to earth had He not already endured psychological pain and moral struggles that would have crushed any unblessed mortal? What was the capacity for pain of this sensitive, noble Man? The more sensitive the Sufferer, the more terribly felt the suffering. Beyond mere dread of death common to all fallen man, He was *earth's only Unfallen Man* about to be sentenced undeservedly to the death of a sinner before God's righteous sentence as if His were the accumulated guilt of all our sin. Unfairly and largely unappreciated, He would suffer under the curse of sin, the just for the unjust (Gal. 3:13; I Peter 2:22ff.; 3:18).

But why did He disclose this weakness to His men? While He did not make a great show of His private prayers, neither did He scrupulously and totally hide them, when the witnesses could be taught thereby and share with Him. They must see that His deeply-felt dread proves that He had no ambitious claims to the High-priestly position. Rather, He meekly submitted to His being called by God, qualified and anointed for the task (Heb. 5:4-10). His was the suffering of a real Man. In retrospect, He gave them a model of how rightly to suffer for righteousness.

*Watch with me:* while they are to pray for themselves, His concern is that they stay awake with Him. Even though these men were no real protection for Him against what He feared, He could derive some comfort simply from knowing that they were watching the approaching storm with Him. By expressing His need of human fellowship, He proved how deeply He is aware of our need for it too (Heb. 4:15). In this meager request we see His sense of isolation which had already begun (John 6:66) and would soon grow (Matt. 26:56) until His abandonment by God (27:46).

### The battle with self

**26:39** And he went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me:

nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. To fall on one's face denotes particularly deep earnestness of soul. (Cf. Num. 16:22; II Sam. 12:16; II Chron. 20:18; Neh. 8:6.) To understand this agonizing struggle we must compare His brokenness and prostration here with His poise and power on every other occasion!

By addressing God as *my Father*, Jesus expressed two tremendous truths:

1. His unique relation to the Father: He is a Son of God in a way not shared by any other human being or angel. To Jesus, God is "**My Father**," not "our Father." (Cf. 6:9 notes.) Even though *abba* in Aramaic might be used for both (see Kittel, art. *Abba*, J. Jeremias, *Supplemento al Grande Lessico dei Nuovo Testamento*, Paideia, Brescia, 1968), all of Jesus' revelations of His unique relation to the Father argue that His meaning here is again His unique Sonship.
2. He revealed that His relation to the Lord of the universe is that of a close family. Because "Abba" is Aramaic for "Daddy," this term belonged to the familiar, daily conversation of little children talking with their father. In fact, Jesus' choice deliberately intends to reveal a concept of sonship, and consequently, of fatherhood, that is absolutely new, unheard of in Judaism (J. Jeremias, *Abba*, *op. cit.*). In so doing, He revealed the heart of our Creator. He is not merely an icy-willed Supreme Being, but *my Father*, Abba, the highest possible encouragement to approach the Governor of the universe with all the confidence, tenderness and loving trust of a Person whose welcome and audience with God is unquestioned.

*If it be possible:* Mark has "All things are possible to thee." Luke has "If you are willing." It is easily conceivable that Jesus should have uttered all three expressions, since they are the kind of formulation to be expected of a person suffering and yet praying in earnest, such as He. Because Jesus fully comprehended both the physical and psychological pain awaiting Him (Jn. 18:4) and the great purpose of His entire incarnation, this proviso means, "If there is a way consistent with my mission whereby man can yet be saved." Never did He plunge to the nadir of demanding absolutely and unconditionally that He be exempted. Because He loved us more than Himself, there could be no other way!

God's holy character *could* not and His love *would* not permit any deviation from redemption's pain. Out of this submission come three awe-inspiring conclusions.

1. While Jesus' human instinct of self-preservation is deeply shaken by the dreadful prospect of suffering, His firm resolve to do God's will remains steady, determined. His would be a free-will offering.
2. To save man there is no other way, but the cross of Christ. Had there been some other option, may it not be legitimately argued that His loving heavenly Father would have used it?! This realization uncompromisingly cancels all hope of salvation by any name, law, method, talisman or religion other than Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Gethsemane settled it once and for all: He is God's only way back home (John 14:6).
3. If God thought Jesus must endure such engrossing moral pain, then our salvation was neither easy, painless nor cheap. Woe to the Christian who expects his own discipleship to be somehow exempt from risk, sorrow, pain or expense!

*Let this cup pass away from me.* The *cup* is a Semitism referring to one's lot, whatever God sends be it good or bad. (Cf. Ps. 16:5; 23:5; 75:8; Isa. 51:17-21; Matt. 20:22; Rev. 14:10.) Two views of *this cup* are possible:

1. That awful hour of human weakness and temptation to surrender to His desire to save Himself from the menacing suffering. However, other, later martyrs would show more fortitude and composure than this, fearlessly facing death without flinching.
2. Because He came to "taste death for every one" (Heb. 2:9), He means the entire Passion: Judas' betrayal, the mockery of justice, the pain of scourging and crucifixion, death and burial. It was the intolerable knowledge that most men would not either appreciate His act nor avail themselves of it (Matt. 7:13f.; Luke 18:8). So that we might not have to suffer sin's penalty, He must take our sins in His own body, as if He Himself had committed them (II Cor. 5:21). No human ever suffered this moral pain, nor ever will, because He alone was without sin. To be separated from the Father by this load of guilt would be for Jesus what Hell means to us. (Cf. Isa. 59:2; Eph. 2:1, 12; II Thess. 1:9.) No wonder He begged the Father for the privilege of exemption!

Undoubtedly McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 230) is right to sense a pause in Jesus' prayer between His cry of self-preservation and His

sublime self-renunciation: "there is a pause—a solemn and momentous pause freighted with the destinies of a world." Do we dare believe that our salvation might not have been? Here is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!

*Nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt.* This alone is true faith. He trusts God's wisdom alone to know what is best for the race and for Himself. One believes very little about God, if he believes himself most qualified to know what is most needed in every circumstance. Jesus is willing to let God be God and rule His, (Jesus') universe with righteousness and supreme wisdom. His submission both defines and exemplifies true godliness and reverence (Heb. 5:7). Our Lord claimed no special privileges of sonship, but meekly submitted as should any son. And when the Father said "no," He accepted it. Prayer is not a motor for twisting God's arm to overcome His unwillingness, but a transmission that links us to His power to drive us on His missions.

The secret of His victory consists in deliberately choosing to subject His human desire to that of the Father. The victory over death on the cross began with this victory over self, because in it He submitted to the will of the Giver of life. Hence, He marched to the cross, not as victim, but as Victor. His ability to pray this mighty prayer was not the result of a last-minute heroic emotion suddenly blossoming there in the garden, but the set purpose of His whole life (John 5:30; 6:38). *Nevertheless:* with this solitary word He defied the supposedly absolutely compelling demands of circumstances and the undeniable pressures of the world and crucified His own right of self-determination!

How His will could be truly separate from that of the Father shall remain forever a mystery to mankind whose own ignorance of the interrelation between body and spirit does not permit full understanding even of itself. Nonetheless, the distinction between Jesus' human desire to be liberated from His impending suffering and God's will that He die, is a real one. His deity could not interfere with the will of God. Hence, what is manifest in this titanic struggle is Jesus' human instinct of self-preservation wrestling against His desire to do God's will, even if it meant death. Though He was divine, it was in the manner of an entirely human being that He suffered (Phil. 2:5ff.). Therefore, let us not attempt to explain what may well go far beyond our poor powers, but love Him for the great love that bound Him to us enough to go through that ordeal for us.

## When best friends do not understand

**26:40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? That He findeth them sleeping** speaks of His discovering what He did not previously know. This fact evidences the limitations of His human knowledge. Had He foreknown each time that they were asleep, He could not have discovered their failure. Even this insight into His limitations increases our appreciation of His suffering.

*Sleeping* "for sorrow" (Luke 22:45) indicates, not their indifference to Jesus, but their deep love for Him. Grief and the battle fatigue of previous days of campaigning alongside the Lord now took their toll. They could not guess what He was really suffering. The late night hour, coupled with the nervous strain brought on by that evening's heart-breaking revelations, conspired to lull these emotionally exhausted spiritual sentinels to sleep.

Nevertheless, Jesus' reaction proves they could have stayed awake, if they had but besought God for power to overcome the grief that drained them so. *What?* expresses Jesus' disappointment and His words hit home. Although Peter had sworn to stand beside the Lord in prison or in death, he was anything but a Rock now. (See on 16:18; cf. John 1:42.) Shortly after, he would lunge wildly forward in a mad suicidal defense against a superior military force. Now, however, he lacked the stimulation to prove dependable in an isolated prayer vigil when Jesus really needed him. Already warned of his approaching failure, Jesus warns him once more. But none of the others (*ye*) proved steadfast either.

## The problem and its solution

**26:41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.** He personally knew what a deadly peril *temptation* was. If He, earth's Perfect Man, senses His own human frailty when face to face with the strain of the supreme demands of obedience to God, how much more so should His drowsy disciples! So He urgently repeated to the inner Three the admonition to the eight disciples upon leaving them at the garden gate. (Cf. Luke 22:40.) Although theoretically, they now hear it twice, to their own damage they failed to heed it even once. *That you enter not into temptation* means "that you not walk right into unexpected trials without realizing you find yourself in such a situation." Their susceptibility to trials could be tragically fatal to their discipleship. (See on

26:31.) Hence, He graciously points to the source of their collapse. Therefore, staying away from temptation is dependent upon the close cooperation of two factors:

1. *Watch*: personal alertness which recognizes one's own vulnerability in time and consequent need for grace. Otherwise, one begins to entertain temptation as a welcome guest, until the will to resist is itself overcome. "Constant vigilance is the price of liberty."
2. *Pray*: dependence upon the leadership, power and protection of God. It also involves the constant submission of one's desires—temptation's target (James 1:14f.)—to the will and direction of God. Such prayer is not intended to eliminate all temptation per se, because this would mean to compromise man's freedom to desire. Rather, it pleads for strength to overcome what cannot be avoided. In the present case it was the disciples' own imperfect understanding of Jesus' Kingdom that was the source of their failure. Therefore, such praying must reorient the mind to let God's wisdom decide their worldview. Had the disciples done this, they would not have been scandalized by Jesus' apparent inability to save Himself from what they assumed was a one-way trip to disaster. He wants them safeguarded by concentration on God, just as He was.

His justification for this admonition lies precisely in the vulnerability and tension created by man's complex nature: *the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*. (Cf. Gal. 5:17.) By *spirit* Jesus means our intellect, emotions, will and conscience. *Flesh*, then, refers to the basic instincts and emotions of our bodily human nature. (Remember Isa. 40:6-8; cf. *sàrx* in I Cor. 1:29; Gal. 2:16.) These men were not sleeping because of indifference, but due to emotional and physical strain. Hence, we are tempted to believe that, because our *spirit* is eager to do the right, we are necessarily *completely* committed to it. Unfortunately, our emotions, our body needs, our instincts, especially the basic instinct of self-preservation, may easily override our spiritual commitment. This weakness of *the flesh* regularly exposes us to temptations that overrule our most ardent commitment to the most truly orthodox convictions.

In this explanation of human vulnerability, can it be doubted that Jesus also included Himself, speaking of His own *spirit* and *flesh*? (Jesus has no total depravity doctrine in mind. For Him, *the flesh is weak*, not utterly dead.) Just as He had met decisive temptations at the beginning of His ministry, He must again meet

this last, decisive assault which pitted the natural instincts of His *flesh* against the commitments of His *spirit*. Just as the disciples' *flesh* was overcome by emotional weariness despite their protestations that their *spirit* was faithful, His *flesh* was rebelling against pain and death itself, even though His *spirit* was perfectly ready to do God's will. So, in His incarnation He faced problems and temptations common to us all. This imposed on Him the limitations of our human predicament too. So, if the Son of God needed such spiritual power to overcome, how much more do mortals such as we?!

Some see His gentle rebuke as Jesus' loving apology for their human weakness. He, the offended One, mercifully covered their offense with an explanation that in itself is amazingly helpful and edifying. Even so, His warning must not be an excuse for our indifference, but a bracing warning to be alert.

In these two verses are brought into play three elements of His own prayer model (6:9f.): 1. God is addressed as *Father*. 2. *Thy will be done*. 3. "that you enter not into temptation" echoes "Lead us not into temptation."

He who stood firm against the temptation to do or be anything but God's man in the crisis that night was the only one who watched and prayed. The others panicked and fled.

### The victory over self

26:42 **Again a second time he went away, and prayed, saying, My Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it, thy will be done.** He repeated the substance of the previous prayer (Mark 14:39). But in stating His former prayer negatively, there is now a subtle distinction in meaning. Jesus now assumes as settled that *this cannot pass away*. And, since He could have no doubt that the Father heard Him (John 11:42), the fact that His suffering was continuing already answered His first prayer, *as you will*. God had responded in the negative. Therefore, in His consenting to the impossibility, Jesus begins to drink the cup on this note of true, self-denial, not out of the bitter resignation of a false martyrdom but because it was the Father's will.

While Jesus rightly prayed, "All things are possible to you," the Father's range of options was not limitless, because of the moral nature of God and man, the requirements of divine justice and the

consequent redemption. God could not do absolutely all things, because He had limited Himself. How agonizingly painful it must have been for our Father to have to say "No," His own heart broken by the choice between sinful man and His own dear Son!

But if His submission is already totally settled, why, then, did He yet pray a third time? He was reiterating and confirming to Himself and God what He had so resolutely decided earlier.

**26:43 And he came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.** His continuing to return to them proves His longing for friendly support. Undoubtedly, He was also anxious that they overcome through prayer and be valiant during the trial about to break upon them. Evidently, Jesus spoke again, but "they did not know what to answer Him" (Mark 14:40; cf. Mark 9:6).

**26:44 And he left them again, and went away, and prayed a third time, saying again the same words.** Just as Paul prayed the same prayer three times and received a negative response from God with the assurance that "My grace is sufficient for you" (II Cor. 12:8ff.), so also Jesus chose to glorify God through weakness. When Jesus appeared weakest because of insults, hardship, persecution and calamity, the power of God shone most brilliantly in Him. This *saying again the same words* has nothing to do with repetition of empty, fixed liturgical forms in prayer. (Cf. 6:7.) His complaint was against words empty of meaning and hearts unaware of God. Rather, His own repetition here is precisely the opposite, expressing deep intensity of His feeling as He continues to deal with the same soul-piercing problem. (Cf. I Kings 17:20f.)

**26:45 Then cometh he to the disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.** The command in 26:46 to rouse themselves stands in direct opposition to this (supposed) command to the disciples to *sleep on now and take your rest* (v. 45), because there, Jesus argues that they should get moving, rather than go to sleep. How should we interpret the verb form in question? Further, Mark (14:41) inserts a short word at this point (*apéchei*) that challenges translators and leaves our quandary basically unsolved. Two major interpretations seem appropriate:

1. "It is enough" from a commercial technical term meaning "to receive a sum in full and give a receipt for it" (Arndt-Gingrich, 84).
2. "He (or perhaps: it) is distant." (See Johnson-DeWalt, *Mark*, 424.) Whatever danger for which they should stay awake is far enough away to justify a short rest before it arrives.

*Sleep on now and take your rest*, expressed in Greek as a second person plural verb, is ambiguous, because the form of the verb could be either indicative or imperative, i.e. either a statement, even expressed as a question, or a command.

1. If it is a command, the circumstance indicated by Jesus in the last half of the verse makes it sadly ironic: "Try to keep asleep *now* and get a good night of rest! It just so happens that I am going to be betrayed in the next 15 minutes!" Their indifference to their own spiritual danger as contrasted to their alertness to physical peril shown in their reactions merits this rebuke. Accordingly, Mark's expression may mean: "Enough of my scolding you for past weakness! We have other problems now. Here come Judas and his cohorts."

Similarly, others would see this expression as a sad question expressed in the indicative mood: "Are you continuing to sleep, although I have urged you to wake and pray?" Mark's expression, then means, "Enough [of your attempts to sleep and my efforts to wake you]!"

2. Another view sees this as a paradoxical concession: "Go ahead and sleep now, because, so far as I am concerned, I can no longer use you to watch with me." This accuses them of indifference to Jesus' needs. Mark's expression then means: "Enough [of your watching with me]. I cannot use your help any longer, because the time has passed for that."
3. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 231) believes in the first phrase Jesus concedes, while in the second, having just noticed the near arrival of the enemy. He rapidly changes the subject. This is the expression of strong emotion that looks at the question first from His point of view, then from theirs.
4. Others, sensing the strident contrast between His comforting them to sleep and His two urgent statements: *Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners*, posit an unstated, undefined lapse of time after Jesus' *Sleep on now, and take your rest*, or perhaps after 26:45. This is a real concession to their weakness, as if He meant, "There is a bit of time left for getting some rest before the storm" (*katheùdete tò loipòn*: "Sleep for the remainder of the time"). So they drop off to sleep again. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 920f.) marvels over Jesus' compassion:

The Shepherd, who has been asking the disciples to watch with him, is now tenderly keeping vigil over them. His own victory

having been won, perfect peace has been restored to his own heart. He has been strengthened through prayer. To be sure, the three men had failed him. But never, no never will his love fail them! What we have here, accordingly, is one of the most touching pictures in the Gospels, and one, moreover, that is entirely in harmony with the sympathetic character of the Savior.

He may have sat quietly thinking while they slept on until the coming of the soldiers. Then, to give them the common courtesy of facing their foe awake and on their feet He aroused them with Mark's expression, "It is enough," meaning that their period of rest was finished.

Either way, they had missed their unique opportunity to be of any use to Jesus at His greatest hour of need for human help. His moment of frailty has passed. Their moral support is no longer needed, because He is now serene and self-possessed, ready to meet death face to face and win.

The son of God goes forth to war  
a kingly crown to win

**26:46 Arise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that betrayeth me.** Our Lord, fully aware of what would befall Him, boldly presented Himself to be our sacrifice! Such tranquility and courage proves that Jesus' prayer was answered. Rather than remove His suffering, God gave Him strength to bear it. He arose from cringing and crying to face the grim battle of the ages. This is the purpose of praying: that while kneeling before God we may find the marvelous resilience and moral power to attack life's problems head-on. Only after such prayer comes victory.

*Behold, he is at hand that betrayeth me.* The bobbing pinpoints of torch-light may have become discernible in the distance as the numerous arresting party poured out of Jerusalem. Perhaps Jesus could already hear the hushed murmur of voices, the clank of weaponry and the tread of boots on the rocky pathway leading to the garden. So He speaks with urgency, lest the drowsy disciples be totally unprepared for what must follow.

In an age where even religious activities are geared to stroking our feelings and coddling our sentiments in order to make us feel good in

our sins, we must look to Jesus! In a day when we are instructed to find a life-style that feels good, we must remember that He could say "NO!" to His impulses in order to save us from our certain destiny. When, in order to assuage our sense of guilt, sentimental songs of self-congratulation take the place of God-centered hymns, when chummy pep-talks feebly supplant life-changing messages that exalt the living God and stir us to responsible action, we must look to Jesus! He did not *feel like* going to the cross for anyone. It is to *this* role-model that we are called (Rom. 8:29; I Peter 2:21; I John 2:6; John 13:15).

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. List the events that led up to the prayer in Gethsemane.
2. By what general route did Jesus arrive in the garden? Locate Gethsemane. What does this word mean?
3. How did He organize Himself and His men in order to achieve premium opportunity for prayer?
4. What various emotions are attributed to Jesus during this scene?
5. What personal admonitions did He give the disciples for their spiritual protection?
6. Explain the meaning of "watch with me."
7. List and explain the various petitions Jesus included in His prayer.
8. What "cup" did Jesus ask the Father to remove?
9. What reproof did Peter deserve from Jesus?
10. Explain the relationship between watching and praying, then indicate how these protect a person against temptations.
11. How does one "enter into temptation"?
12. Explain why the disciples' "eyes were heavy."
13. How many times did Jesus repeat His prayer?
14. What final rebuke did the disciples merit for their sleeping?

### SECTION 68

#### JESUS IS ARRESTED

(Parallels: Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12)

TEXT: 26:47-56

47 And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief

priests and elders of the people. 48 And he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he: take him. 49 And straightway he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Rabbi; and kissed him. 50 And Jesus said unto him, Friend, *do* that for which thou art come. Then they came and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. 51 And behold, one of them that were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and smote the servant of the high priest, and struck off his ear. 52 Then saith Jesus unto him, Put again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. 53 Or thinkest thou that I cannot beseech my Father, and he shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54 How then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? 55 In that hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching, and yet took me not. 56 But all this is come to pass, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him, and fled.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What evidence of meticulous preparation do you see in this arresting party? Why so many armed men needed?
- b. How does Jesus' attitude in this section differ from that expressed during His agony in Gethsemane?
- c. Why does each of the Gospel writers entitle Judas "one of the twelve" as if their readers had never heard of this man already well-introduced earlier in every one of the Gospels? Are they merely copying a stereotyped tradition, or is there some other reason that made this formula necessary?
- d. To arrest a teacher believed heretical, how many men are needed? What does the number of armed men with Judas indicate about their attitude toward Jesus?
- e. The Synoptics relate that Judas *immediately* approached Jesus to betray Him, but John completely ignores the betrayal kiss and gives attention to Jesus' overawing the arresting party. Is a harmony of these facts possible? How should we treat the Gospels when one or more of them does not relate facts chronicled in the others? Are they completely unaware of information related by others?
- f. Why do you think Judas needed to give a sign of recognition?

- Was not Jesus already well known? If so, why need the kiss to point Him out?
- g. Why did Judas call Jesus "Rabbi"? Did not he know His personal name?
  - h. Who do you think Judas thought he was betraying: Jesus or the authorities? Do you think he really hated Jesus? Why did he betray Him?
  - i. Why did Jesus call Judas, "Friend"? Was He appealing to him or rebuking him or something else? What effect could this title produce in Judas?
  - j. If Judas had already given the betrayal sign by kissing Jesus, how could Jesus then say, "Friend, do that for which you are come"? Is not this nonsense? Or do we have a correct translation of Jesus' words?
  - k. Why do you suppose the well-armed men of the arresting force had not attacked Jesus before, or at least when Peter started slashing with his sword?
  - l. What does Peter's violent reaction reveal about the man?
  - m. In what way(s) was he so wrong for using the sword?
  - n. What impression did Peter give others of Jesus' teaching that night?
  - o. What should everyone have understood when Jesus claimed the protection of an innumerable host of angels to avoid this arrest? That angels really exist? Would the Sadducean hierarchy have agreed with Him? Do you?
  - p. What should people have understood when Jesus asserted that the Scriptures foretold even this arrest? How would this help the Apostles?
  - q. Why did Jesus not hesitate to condemn the cowardly attack by His foes?
  - r. Why did the disciples abandon Jesus? Do you think that the soldiers would have arrested the disciples too?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Now Judas, who betrayed Jesus, also knew about the Garden of Gethsemane, for He had often met there with His disciples. So Judas procured a Roman detachment of 600 infantry and some subalterns of the Temple police dispatched by the chief priests and Pharisees. These went there equipped with lanterns, torches and weapons.

Just as Jesus was still speaking about the near arrival of His betrayer, Judas, one of the Twelve appeared, accompanied by a great crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent by the clergy, theologians and rulers of the nation. Then Jesus, with full awareness of all the things that were going to happen to Him, stepped forward and addressed the mob, "Who are you looking for?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they answered Him.

"I am He," Jesus told them. (Judas, the traitor, was standing there with them.) When the Lord said, "I am He," they lurched backward and fell all over themselves. Once more He questioned them, "Who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they repeated.

"I already told you that I am your man," Jesus responded. "So, if I am the one you want, let these other men go." This was how the word He had prayed came true, "I did not lose a single one of these You gave me."

Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, "The man I greet with a kiss is your man. Arrest him and lead him away well-guarded." Going at once to Jesus, he said, "Hello, Teacher!" and kissed Him affectionately.

But Jesus challenged him, "What are you doing here, friend? Judas, would you use a *kiss* to betray me, your Messiah?"

At this they stepped forward, grabbed Jesus and held Him tight. When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they shouted, "Lord, shall we use our swords now?" At this point Simon Peter, one of those who stood by Jesus, reached for his sword, drew it and slashed at the high priest's slave and sliced off his right ear. (The slave's name was Malchus.) But Jesus stopped Peter, "Sheath your sword! Killing only leads to more killing! Those who wantonly take justice into their own hands and kill, rightly deserve death. Do you suppose that I cannot appeal to my Father or that He would not instantly place more than 72,000 angels at my disposal? On the other hand, how could the Bible texts be fulfilled, that say it must happen this way? The Father has given me a cup of suffering to drink; shall I refuse to drink it?"

(To those who held Him, Jesus said,) "Let me do this much at least." He then touched the man's ear and miraculously restored it.

At that point Jesus said to the chief priests, the Temple police and the elders who were there to arrest Him, "Did you have to march out heavily armed to capture me, as if I were a dangerous outlaw?"

Day after day, when I was in your reach, sitting in the Temple courts teaching, you never laid a finger on me. But this is the hour you choose and the authority darkness gives you! Yet all this has occurred just like the writings of the prophets said it would.”

Then the Roman detachment and their colonel along with the Jewish subordinates took hold of Jesus and tied His hands. Then all the disciples deserted Him and escaped. But a certain young man, wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his naked body, was following Him. They grabbed him, but he slipped out of the linen cloth and escaped naked.

## SUMMARY

Judas led a large contingent of men armed with weapons and judicial authority to arrest Jesus. However, He overwhelmed them by offering Himself up to them. When they regained their composure, Judas brazenly gave the betrayal signal. This moved the authorities to action, but also unleashed the armed disciples. Peter started carving with his sword, but Jesus blocked any further action and healed the wounded man. Further, He attributed all that was happening to the express will and planning of God. He then reproached the authorities for their moral cowardice evident in this night arrest of a man whom they could easily have taken in broad daylight. But this too was foreseen in Scripture. Jesus permitted them to bind Him and lead Him away, while His followers made good their escape, that is, all but one who “barely” made it.

## NOTES

### THE MAN WHO REFUSED TO FIGHT

Jesus, our model of forbearance and restraint

#### I. THE AUDACIOUS, ALL-OUT ATTACK BY EVIL MEN (26:47-49)

26:47 **And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.** Matthew does not state when Judas left the Apostolic band to begin his evil mission, but simply presupposes what John records, that he rushed away from the Pass-over supper (John 13:30).

Why continue to call *Judas, one of the twelve*, when he was already well-known to Matthew's reader? (Cf. 10:4; 26:14.) Rather than term this expression "a stereotyped, traditional formulation," there are simpler solutions:

1. *Judas* shared this common name with hundreds of Judases in first-century Israel. (Cf. 13:55; Acts 1:13; Jude 1; John 14:22; Acts 5:37; Acts 9:11; 15:22.) Since Matthew had not reported Judas' hasty departure from the apostolic group at the Passover supper (John 13:30), he must now identify the posse's guide as the *Judas* who was *one of the twelve*. And precisely because of the commonness of names, would not the Synoptics identify the man all the more carefully, lest confusion arise in later years? But could the treachery of *Judas* Iscariot ever be mistakenly laid at the door of any other Judas?
2. This descriptive, *one of the twelve*, repeated here also has the flavor of shame and anguish that such a betrayal by one of His chosen disciples could happen. (See on 26:14.) Cannot Matthew register his shock more than once? Is this any stranger than repeating the list of conspirators, "*chief priests and elders of the people*," which, for the godly in Israel, must have been just as unbelievable, because these leaders might be presumed to welcome, not crucify, God's Christ (26:3, 47, 57, 59; 27:1)?

Judas could be surer of a decisive strike because Jesus habitually used this olive grove as a camping spot (Luke 21:37) and possibly also a meeting place (*sunécthe*, John 18:2). This detail points to Jesus' consistent efforts to convince Jerusalem (23:37f.; Luke 19:41ff.; 23:27ff.; John 2:13ff.—3:21; 5:1ff.; 7:10—10:39). Because Jesus knew Judas knew this, He facilitated the arrest for Judas by going there.

*Great multitude, swords, staves*, "lanterns, torches and weapons," (John 18:3), ropes or chains (John 18:12) were prepared and *Judas* came as guide with his pre-arranged signal. That so many armed men were detached to bring in an itinerate Rabbi, Jesus Himself will term irresponsible overkill (26:55). From this critics could reject the Gospel report as grossly overstated. However, looked at from the viewpoint of the Jews, every precaution underscores the thoroughness of their preparation, their fear of resistance or rescue by Jesus' many friends then in Jerusalem, or their fear that He might simply elude them, as on previous occasions. (Cf. John

7:45f.; 8:59; 10:31, 39.) So, if Judas were not totally trusted, or if a Zealot ambush were feared, or if personal misgivings about attacking a miracle-working prophet, should paralyze the manliest among them, perhaps they could find psychological strength in numbers.

Although the mob was *from the chief priests and elders of the people*, i.e. representing the entire authority of Israel including the Pharisees (John 18:3; see on 26:3), the ecclesiastical leaders themselves came along. (See on 26:55.) Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 922) suggested that, because Jesus hurried Judas out into the night aware that his plot is discovered, he must have alarmed the authorities to take instant, decisive action lest the entire operation be compromised by some unpredictable reaction on Jesus' part. Further, a secret night raid, when Jesus' supporters were least expecting it, had a better chance of success, because any eventual resistance could be overcome more easily. Did the Jews among them simply not observe their Passover supper due to their primary preoccupation with capturing Jesus, or were they summoned away from it, being already alerted to assemble at a moment's notice?

Matthew's estimate, *a great multitude*, does not exaggerate the size of the contingent, because John specifies that the conspirators had been satisfied with bringing nothing less than "the cohort" (*labòn tèn sepefan*, note the article). This military detachment, a tenth part of a legion, usually consisted of 600 men under the command of a Roman tribune or chiliarch (John 18:3, 12). That Romans garrisoned the Castle Antonia during feasts to maintain order and quell riots is well-documented by Josephus (*Ant.* XVII,10,1; XX,5,3; *Wars* V,5,8). John's language seems to distinguish the cohort from the Jewish officers, the Temple police (*hoi huperéti tôn Ioudaion; strategous tou hierou*, John 18:3, 12; Luke 22:52). Because Jewish officers had been swayed by Jesus' discourses before (John 7:45f.), implacable Romans are added to guarantee arrest this time.

Nevertheless, because *speira* is also used in the ancient authors to refer to the Latin *manipulus*, a detachment of 200 men. John may not mean the entire Roman cohort, since this would leave the fortress undermanned and the city dangerously unguarded, if Pilate had brought only a 600-man cohort for this feast. Even so, 200 Romans with their officers, not counting the Levitical guards and other Jews, still amounts to a *multitude* involved in the arrest of a teacher! However, if the authorities feared popular resistance and if the rest of the legionaries remained in the

fortress, the larger number would by no means be thought exaggerated, and the Roman officers would lead a detachment adequate to meet the supposed need.

Therefore, the Romans were involved in Jesus' arrest. But their participation at this early stage means that the Roman involvement began much earlier than the hearing of Jesus' case before Pilate. Would not this, in turn, imply that the elimination of Jesus had already been decided by common agreement between the religious and political authorities, by the Sanhedrin led by the priesthood as well as by Pilate? Are Pilate's attempts to save Jesus, then, to be written off as a farce? Again, one must explain the "disappearance" of the Romans during the Jewish trials of Jesus, as well as from the Synoptic accounts. Attempts to solve this mystery are varied:

1. THE SYNOPTICS REWROTE HISTORY. Some attribute the Roman's absence from Jesus' Jewish trials as due to a tendency in Christian tradition to transfer guilt for Jesus' death from the Romans to the Jews. But by what right can "theological interest of the Evangelist" justify *inventing fact*? Such tampering with truth undermines confidence in any other "fact" they report, leaving nothing certain. Further, if Roman soldiers were needed only for the arrest which succeeded, why should they be further required to continue what Jewish guards can now safely handle?
2. JOHN EXAGGERATED. Others, taking the opposite point of view, say that John simply added the Roman participation at Jesus' arrest for good measure to emphasize the numerical strength and superiority of Jesus' enemies. John is thought to argue that this big multinational force needed to take Jesus could not capture Him, had He not turned Himself over to them spontaneously (John 18:1ff.). Further, Pilate's question suggests that he knew nothing about the cause of Jesus' arrest (John 18:29). Hence, he could not have ordered his men to collaborate with the Jews in effecting it. Therefore, John too rewrote history. But Pilate's purely formal question merely opens the trial and says nothing of what he himself already knew. (See also below.)
3. THERE NEVER WERE ANY ROMANS INVOLVED IN THE ARREST. Perhaps John used the military terms "cohort" (*speira*) and "tribune" (*chiliarchos*) in a non-technical sense to indicate the size and organization of the Jewish band. Luke used "captains" (*strategoï*) in a similar way, and by adding "of the Temple," indicates their

strictly Jewish character. However, by calling the Jewish Temple police *huperétai* (John 7:32, 45; 18:12). John seems to distinguish them from the Roman cohort.

4. PILATE ENTRUSTED A COHORT TO CAIAPHAS. Is it not plausible that, in the interests of prejudicing Rome against the Nazarene. Caiaphas request a cohort from Pilate to capture a dangerous revolutionary? By not specifying further the exact character of Jesus' movement the wily priest could avoid "complications." Perhaps Caiaphas need not even address his request to Pilate, but to the tribune. Was not such a guard at Jewish disposal at other times (cf. 27:65)? However, is it unthinkable that Pilate should have granted it personally, on the assumption that political co-operation in this unthreatening way could relieve tension in Judea? And would not Pilate's otherwise inexplicable availability early the next morning be more credible, if his men reported to him on their unusual activities the night before (27:1f.)? His reactions during the trials point to high-quality intelligence reports concerning the true character of their so-called "dangerous subversive" and indicate he possessed a good grasp of events (cf. 27:18, 23f.; Luke 23:4, 14f., 22).

### The audacity of hypocrisy

26:48 **Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he: take him.** The kiss is decidedly part of the plot, not an afterthought on Judas' part. With many Paschal pilgrims crowding around Jerusalem, in case of a fight they ran the risk of arresting the wrong person in the dark. Why select *this* signal? Because this type of salutation was common among orientals when friends meet after a long absence, especially when a disciple greets his beloved teacher. However, it is unnecessary to think that the betrayer would select a signal as far as possible from his true sentiment, so as better to mask his perfidy. By contrast to the commentaries, the Gospel writers are surprisingly subdued in describing Judas and his betrayal kiss.

1. If the kiss were thought not absolutely necessary for the success of the plot, was this choice the backlash of vengefulness? Could not Judas have pointed Jesus out to the authorities without committing himself so openly, remaining in the background? Does not this hypocritical greeting prove that Jesus' friend had been transformed into a mortal foe? If so, rather than be either revolting

or repulsive to Judas, would not such a kiss be but part of the deep satisfaction of his demand for revenge? However, for men grimly determined to succeed, some definite, unmistakable sign of recognition was necessary in the semi-darkness to eliminate confusion and mistakes. So it is more likely that the kiss was selected, because it permits the betrayer to approach the victim for the most positive identification possible.

2. Was it that he was trying to assuage whatever in his conscience yet accused him of acting in a manner untrue to himself? Was this habitual act of formal respect and affection intended by Judas to hide from himself the full impact of his sin while doing it? Not too likely, because he may not have considered his act a sin in the final analysis, especially if he viewed the ensuing crisis as merely a crucial step in the final exaltation of Jesus to the Jewish Messiahship with its material throne, economic power and political clout. (See notes on 26:14.)
3. In harmony with his own warped views of Messiahship, this kiss was but an essential step toward the mistaken goal he envisioned. It was, thus, neither hypocritical nor vengeful, but simply part of the mechanism necessary to make his plan work. He himself could hold Jesus firm, distract Him and give the guards time to grab Him. At the same time, did Judas expect the kiss to have even a *positive* effect on Jesus, persuading Him of Judas' loyalty despite the fierceness of the crisis now beginning? Judas stood to gain, if Jesus were convinced of this. Thus, *for Judas, the kiss is not a betrayal of Jesus but of the enemies who stood in the way of Iscariot's Kingdom of the Messiah.* What Judas said publicly to the enemy (26:15, 48) may have no relationship to his own secret motives. Here is his hypocrisy.

This agrees better with Judas' consciousness of Jesus' many miracles, even if he forgot the Lord's ability to read the motives of his heart. This refusal to read baseness in Judas' manner is not to clothe the man with motives more or less respectable, but to understand how a common disciple like me could ever become capable of committing so terrible a sin as turning the Savior of the world over to His enemies. In fact, "The worst opponents of Christ are still those who betray with a kiss—such as those who oppose His claims while affecting to revere His character, and deny His Saviourship while acknowledging the excellence of His doctrine" (*P.H.C.*, XXIII, 543).

26:49 **And straightway he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Rabbi; and kissed him.** *Straightway* should be understood in a relative sense,

i.e. "immediately" in reference to what? Did Judas, instantly upon arrival at the garden, walk right up to Jesus, give Him the betrayal kiss and turn Him over to His enemies who immediately hauled Him away, with the sole interruption of Peter's defense? John, however, clearly remember Jesus' bold self-surrender to the mob, an act that so overpowered them that He almost had to insist that they take Him (John 18:4-9). Solutions are related to the respective locations of Jesus, Judas, the apostles and the various components of the arresting party inside or outside the garden:

1. Would Jesus' bold challenge have had the startling moral ascendancy that it did, if Judas strode *straightway* up to Jesus, as the mob expected him to, and gave the prearranged signal in a manner obvious to all? On the other hand, in the shadows cast by the flickering torches and the Paschal moon, Judas may have acted prematurely. If, in his eagerness to betray Jesus, he forged ahead of the mob, he may have approached Jesus directly and awkwardly betrayed Him with a kiss before the main body of troops and authorities could make out what he had done. (The same effect would occur, if, out of fear of Jesus, the troops and authorities held back somewhat, and consequently in the half-darkness missed Judas' signal.) After Judas' designation, then, Jesus identified Himself to the mob, majestically challenging them to arrest Him and free His men. Some prefer this view because Jesus' regal bearing and unexpectedly bold challenge could still shake the sternest of men even after Judas' kiss and *precisely because they knew Him to be* their quarry. See Lenski on *John*, 1181f., for his own and Luther's arguments in favor of a miracle.
2. The PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY presents the view that Jesus, alone and unarmed, anticipated Judas' betrayal. Complete master of the situation, He offered Himself before Judas could act. This moral supremacy focused all attention on Him and avoided a universal round-up of His men. Then, to complete his part in the plot, Judas, who hitherto had been standing with the posse (John 18:5), blundered forward to give the now practically superfluous confirming kiss that signalled for anyone yet in doubt that Jesus is the one to arrest.

However, this gesture was neither totally worthless nor without effect. If the soldiers took the foreground, leaving the priests who knew Jesus behind them, for those officers who did not know Jesus

of Nazareth personally, His self-identification might have been interpreted as shielding the real insurrectionist they sought. If the Romans had orders from their superiors to arrest only the man whom Judas identified by the kiss, they would not have acted until he did. Further, by daring to approach their Foe and touching him, Judas broke the spell of whatever fear they had of His divine majesty or of some terrible miracle He might use to defend Himself from them. (Cf. John 18:4-7.) This emboldened them to act.

By kissing Him with particular fervor (*katephilesen*) as opposed to a simple kiss (*philesō*, v. 48), some believe Judas merely prolonged the unrepeatable sign to assure the guards of Jesus' identity. This would be consistent with his ostentatious, *Hail, Rabbi*. (Cf. 26:25, not "Lord, but 'Rabbi.'") Some see in this his conscience and affection that struggle with a stern will to get it over with. However, the kiss expressed strong emotion not inconsistent with his secret soul which he never sold out to Jesus' enemies. Dreaming only of future wealth, how would he treat the man who is his ticket to incalculable wealth and power? After all, he does not suspect that he is really turning Jesus over to His death. (Cf. 27:3; see notes on 26:14.)

## II. HIS CHALLENGE TO MORAL SENSE (26:50)

26:50 **And Jesus said unto him, Friend, do that for which thou art come. Then they came and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.** Addressing Judas as *Friend (hetaïre)*, Jesus treats the man, not as a beloved "friend" (*philos*, cf. John 15:14f.), but holds him at the briefest of distance, "Buddy, mate." As in English, *Friend* can be used to address "someone whose name one does not know" (20:13; 22:12; Arndt-Gingrich, 314). Depending on context, *hetaïros* refers to one's companion or comrade in arms, one's mate on ships, at table, in slavery, etc. Consequently, it can also mean "lover, disciple, follower, adherent, partisan, body-guard" (Rocci, 776).

Reminding Judas of all that they had shared together, this exquisite word combines a rebuke of Judas' treachery with a touching appeal to his heart and conscience to dissuade the man from his determination. After all, Judas has not yet killed himself: he could yet repent as would Peter. This view harmonizes with the words whereby Jesus also challenged and shamed Judas, "Would you betray the Son of man with a kiss" (Luke 22:48)? By calling Judas' act by its real name, betrayal, His words were calculated to shock the man with the real

enormity of his sin. These words should haunt him, if he would but abandon his own mistaken views of Messiahship, while the gentleness of Christ's pleading could not yet arouse his conscience, break his heart and lead him to repent and ask forgiveness. Over Akeldama the noose was not yet tied for Judas Iscariot. . . .

*Do that for which thou art come.* Translated this way, this sentence is nonsense; for, by betraying Jesus with a kiss, Judas had *already* done that for which he had come. Jesus could know that his role in the entire procedure had just been played. So, why should the Lord still urge his betrayer to carry out his mission? Further, since the verb "do" does not appear in Greek here, the phrase (*hetaïre, eph' ho pâirei*) really breaks off suddenly, leaving His thought incomplete. Therefore, something must be supplied to complete it.

1. Some, like the RSV, treat it as a question: "Friend, for what are you come?" or, "Friend, what are you doing here?" Robertson (*Word Pictures*, I,215) believes Deissmann "has proven conclusively that it is a question, *eph'ho* in late Greek having the interrogative sense of *epi ti* (Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 725). . . . Most of the early translations (Old Latin, Old Syriac) took it as a question." However, *ho* is a not normally an interrogative pronoun, but a relative-demonstrative. Arndt-Gingrich (588) admit the possibility that the relative be used to take the place of the interrogative pronoun in a direct question but confess that the only example of this construction in our literature, i.e. Matthew 26:50, is much in dispute. Arndt-Gingrich (587) suggest as missing words, "friend, (are you misusing the kiss) for that (purpose) for which you are here?" or perhaps "in connection with that (= the purposes), for which (= for the realization of which) you have appeared (do you kiss me)?"
2. Blass-Debrunner (§ 300) term it . . .

"Controversial Matthew 26:50 . . . : hardly a direct question 'For what?' The easiest solution is to take it as a painful, ironic reminiscence of a toast like the one attested on a goblet from Syria: . . . 'Enjoy yourself! for that's why you are here.'"

It could be viewed as an sad exclamation, almost a groan: "What you are here for!" Judas, Jesus' companion, was on the wrong side, so the Lord's reaction compels him to grasp the outrageousness of what he is doing.

Either way, because Judas hid his dream of self-aggrandizement from Jesus, the Lord rightly rejects this apparently real affection as expressive of Judas' true motive.

*Then they came and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.* Matthew and Mark present this seizure before Peter's attack, while Luke and John appear to place it afterwards. However, the latter give general summaries of the night's activities, not a calculated refutation of their colleagues' affirmations. No one included a precise notation of the time or sequence. Accordingly, upon Judas' signal, when guards began to seize Jesus, Peter dashed in, his sword flashing. This temporarily halted the arrest. When Jesus halted Peter, the guards finished what they had begun. Then, as everyone turned his attention on Jesus, the disciples were permitted to escape with greater safety.

Having given His consent to suffer what He Himself had predicted and the Scriptures foresaw, declining every form of rescue whether from earth or heaven, He now willingly accepted those bonds that would be removed only to nail Him to the tree. But the only bonds which would or could hold Jesus, were not the puny chains of human manufacture, but love: "He loved me and gave Himself up for me."

#### The interruption by violence (26:51)

**26:51 And behold, one of them that were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and smote the servant of the high priest, and struck off his ear.** Some other armed disciple (Simon the Zealot?), misinterpreting Jesus' earlier remark about buying swords (Luke 22:35ff.) and ignoring Jesus' demand that the disciples be permitted to leave (John 18:8), and recognizing the imminent danger in which Jesus now stood, cried out, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" (Luke 22:49). Not waiting for the answer and possibly emboldened by Jesus' overpowering His would-be assailants (John 18:6), the dauntless Peter drew his sword and rushed to attack a superior force single-handedly. With the courage of the desperate, he was determined to take out as many as he could before getting killed himself. He would show Jesus here and now the sincerity of his earlier promises of loyalty unto death!

But in doing so, he struck an ill-considered blow for worldly Messiahship, the same dangerous concept that drove Judas to create this crisis for Jesus. Peter's violence reflected against the Lord Himself by justifying His enemies' fear that the Lord was the revolutionary

head of a band of cut-throats. He was robbing Jesus of His right to claim, "My Kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my officers would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place" (John 18:36). Lenski (*Matthew*, 1050) wrote: "Peter acts as though Jesus meant none of the things he said. His love does not listen and obey. . . ."

We too fall for Peter's temptation when we put our trust in material weapons for the advancement of the Church of Christ. Wealth, political influence, power-plays and materialistic world-views that secularize in order to popularize, are methods that possess no divine power to save. However well meaning, these attempts to grab a larger slice of power and prestige in a power-hungry world are but the same violent slashing of swords. It denies Jesus' true goals and spiritual methods, and if unhindered, renders Scripture useless and effectually shuts the Kingdom of heaven against men. Such a program is as much an embarrassment to Jesus' cause now as Peter's violence was to Him then. (Contrast II Cor. 10:3-5.)

*Smote Malchus* (John 18:10) *the servant of the high priest*. This slave was a trusted personal agent of the high priest, a fact that explains his intervention to arrest Jesus. *Struck off his ear*: unquestionably, Peter aimed a deadly blow that could have split the skull of Malchus, but the servant's instinctive sidestep foiled Peter's thrust, so he lost only his right ear (Luke 22:49; John 18:10). If the slave wore armor, the blow harmlessly thudded into his shoulder armor. Peter really intended to kill the man.

The indefinite description of Peter as *one of them that were with Jesus* (John 18:10) furnishes incidental evidence of the early dating of Matthew's document. In the darkness the soldiers did not learn the identity of the one who took up arms to resist arrest. To name him while he were alive could have meant unnecessary trials for the man who not only resisted in Gethsemane but also continued to be a thorn in the side of the Sanhedrin which was still ruling when the Synoptic Gospels were penned. (Mary of Bethany is a parallel case, 26:7.) Should Matthew's book, supposedly current only among Christians, contain information that informers among false brethren could transform into vicious arms against the Church? (Cf. notes on 24:10.) But John, who alone names him, wrote long after Peter's death under Nero sometime before 68 A.D. (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* II,25; III,24).

Alford's refutation of this hypothesis is ill-founded, because in the high priest's courtyard Peter's recognition as the assailant

of the servant had lost its sting, precisely because Jesus had healed the man. Thereafter none could complain without admitting Jesus' supernatural power to heal hence His God-given right to say what they rejected.

### III. HIS CALL FOR RESTRAINT

#### A. The Law That Forbids Violence (26:52)

**26:52 Then saith Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.** If the use of violence in defense of Christianity were ever justified, this is the moment to establish its appropriateness. Nevertheless, Jesus moved decisively to block His defenders. What did He mean here?

1. He did not proscribe the legitimate use of weapons of their ownership. It remained *your sword* to be *put again into its place*. However, some interpret these words as expressing Jesus' repudiation of ownership of any sword and of every use of it as having nothing to do with His cause. However, Jesus never demanded that Peter *throw it away*, as if He had a policy of *absolute* non-resistance, for this would be a contradiction of Luke 22:36. Rather, His defense is not the cause, time nor place to use it.
2. Nor does He repudiate the appropriate use of the sword in human justice (Rom. 13:4), as if He hereby threatened constituted authority. To the contrary, Jesus' words may be considered as a legal sentence pronounced, not as a simple future, but as the imperative future (Alford, I,278). Thus, His maxim becomes a virtual parallel to Genesis 9:6 to justify capital punishment: "Those who wantonly take justice into their own hands and kill, rightly deserve death." Thus, Jesus stood up for the maintenance of law and order, even if His own trial would be illegal and its sentence unjust.
3. A divine law of retribution? "Use the sword against men and God will similarly destroy you." In this violent spirit there is no time for mercy or forgiveness (18:21-35). Despite their evil use of the legal system, these are "little ones" whose importance to God must not be despised (18:6-14). They know not what they do!
4. A practical consideration? "Killing leads only to more senseless killing. You cannot avoid escalation. Success in eliminating some does not mean destroying all. You too may be killed." (Cf. Sirach

3:26.) Ironically, this futile, bloody course was followed by many demagogues in Israel in their last desperate bid for freedom from Rome, and received what they deserved in blood.

5. An ethical principle? The use of bloodshed or violence, militarism and inquisitions to advance Christ's Kingdom, is hereby forbidden. (Cf. John 18:36.) If even saving the King, the supreme justification, is interdicted, how much less justified is the use of force to defend its lesser interests? Otherwise, Christianity's foes will take up the sword to attack the Kingdom, question its motives, block its interests, hinder its progress and silence its message,—all in reaction to sword-swinging Christians. The only way to transform the course of history is through loving persuasion, not through belligerence and bluster.

So, Jesus commanded Peter to sheath his sword, not because all use of the sword is wrong, since Jesus Himself did not believe this, but because all taking the law into one's hands by violent measures is wrong. Because the rule applied to every instance of private vengeance, Peter's was a case in point and required correction.

### B. The Heavenly Might That Protects Him (26:53)

**26:53 Or thinkest thou that I cannot beseech my Father, and he shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels?** This reproaches His rash follower: "Do you really suppose I could not escape if I wanted to?" If a Roman *legion* was comprised of 6000 soldiers, He had 72,000 *angels* at His command. This potential Heaven-sent defense force provides two excellent reasons for not fighting to defend Jesus:

1. Peter's feeble efforts are absolutely unnecessary and worse than useless in light of the virtually unlimited, formidable fire-power at His disposal, should He choose to use it. If little children are watched by the angels (18:10), how much more God's only Son? If God's prophets are protected by heavenly might. (Remember II Kings 6:8-17: Elisha surrounded at Dothan!), how much more so His Son?
2. The mob's efforts to take Him against His will could avail nothing. It is immaterial whether or not Jesus' overawing the soldiers (John 18:4-6) be a supernatural expression of His divine power and

majesty, no number of men on earth could touch Him, unless He permitted it.

If the Lord willingly surrendered, one arresting officer was enough. If He really resisted, all the world's armies would never suffice! The irony of *twelve* defenders (Jesus and the eleven Apostles) against a multitude of Roman soldiers is only surpassed by the incomparably greater defence by *twelve legions of angels* whom Jesus sees ready to march but whom He refuses to summon. So He would die, not because unprotected or because a single foe got behind His line of defense, but because He deliberately abandoned His protection.

### C. The Bonds That Hold Him (26:54)

**26:54 How then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?** Here is another argument against fighting: Any kind of deliverance was completely irreconcilable with the destiny predicted for the suffering Servant of Jahveh (Isa. 53; Ps. 22; Zech. 12:10). Therefore, by attempting Jesus' defense, anyone who agreed with Peter was rejecting the deliberate purpose of God stated in *the Scriptures*.

In a critical moment such as this, a man's character and his confidence in his religion are revealed for what they are. The hardest character trait of all to duplicate is a patient, long-suffering love that quietly submits to this outrage. But unfaked godliness is born of confidence in Scripture: *it has to be this way, because the Bible says so*. Despite the fact that those prophetic Scriptures predicted His suffering and revealed that His death was absolutely necessary, Jesus does not hesitate to point men to them as true and God-sent. (See on 26:56.) We trust the Old Testament, because our Lord did, even though it meant death for Him to believe it.

## IV. HIS REPROACH OF COWARDICE (26:55)

### The Moral Inconsistency of Their Tactics

**26:55 In that hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a robber with swords and staves to sieze me? I sat daily in the temple teaching, and ye took me not.** The specific group addressed is "the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders, who had come out against him" (Luke 22:52). The presence of these dignitaries in this night raid is not at all improbable. They would have come to

direct the arrest and make instant decisions, if such became necessary, as well as to give this lynch mob a show of legitimacy (Luke 22:52f.).

Because *lestés* also means "revolutionary, insurrectionist" (Arndt-Gingrich, 474), *as against a robber* suggests two interpretations:

1. He draws an ironic contrast between His own conduct as He sees it and the way they see Him: on the one hand, a Jewish rabbi quietly lecturing in the Temple and, on the other, a dangerous terrorist engaged in subversive activity to support a revolution! Fully the Master of Himself, He scorns the crude arms to which they must now resort, since *they have no other*. Quiet Dialogue, convincing Scriptural argument, intelligent, fair-minded debate and honest, free decision are weapons they do not possess. But these are the arms with which He met His foes and with which He would have us promote His interests. (Cf. 28:18; II Cor. 10:3ff.; II Tim. 2:24f.; Titus 1:9ff.) It is one of the paradoxes of history that, whereas Jesus' enemies feared that He might be a dangerous revolutionary challenging the Establishment's power structure, Judas probably betrayed Jesus precisely because He had refused to do just that!
2. *As against a robber* alludes to their manner of arrest, a night foray with its ridiculous show of force, that treated Him as a rebel leader and fugitive from justice, as if His privacy in the garden were an attempt to escape from His well-deserved fate as a nationalist guerilla who justified his lawlessness in the name of patriotism. Jesus was no Barabbas (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19; John 18:40). On the contrary, His daily teaching the way of truth and righteousness in broad daylight in the most public place possible, the Jerusalem Temple in the very heart of Judaism, proved that His was no clandestine, guerilla movement of opposition to the Roman regime, but one that was open, fearless and honest. He had made no effort to conceal Himself or flee. In fact, of His own accord, He had just come forward to turn Himself over to them. And yet they call out the army just to cope with a *teacher* (cf. 26:47)?

Unless Jesus refers exclusively to the events of the Last Week, *I sat daily in the temple teaching* points to a considerable ministry in Jerusalem, incidental Synoptic confirmation of John's reports (John chaps. 2, 5, 7-10). *Ye took me not*. These treacherous leaders had made no public move to arrest Him and when they attempted something, their men returned empty-handed (John 7:45f.).

At His trial Jesus would again expose this cowardly attack launched in the absence of people who could more honestly judge of its injustice (cf. John 18:20f.). While the corruption, cowardice and malice of Jesus' accusers do not prove His innocence, that He has such as enemies is circumstantial evidence in His favor and suggests further examination of His character and claims.

Some criticize Jesus' rejection of their tactics as vengeful and unworthy of Him. On the contrary, His dignified protest reveals their sin to their face, that they might repent of it. That they did not immediately do so does not mean that His self-possessed, godly manner did not affect any of them or would not haunt them until their death and serve as their condemnation at judgment.

#### V. HIS SOURCE OF CONFIDENCE: EVERYTHING ACCORDING TO PLAN (26:56)

**26:56 But all this is come to pass, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him, and fled.** Jesus calmly accepted the indignity of it all, because He was convinced that His suffering was part of a larger picture painted, even if in dark colors, by the prophets. This conviction of the true significance of His suffering tended to calm His spirit. His resignation here is tantamount to saying: "Let the Scriptures be fulfilled" (Mark 14:49). Let God's Word be true, even if it means a cross for me! Lenski (*Matthew*, 1055):

"Here are the real forces at work in what is taking place this night: God is carrying out his prophetic plans, Jesus is thus voluntarily putting himself into his captors' hands. That and that alone is why this army is scoring such a huge victory against a single humble man!"

The hand that moved events that night, was not that of evil men but the divine purpose of God. Plummer (*Matthew*, 375) asks:

Did this serene statement of His reason for submitting without resistance convey to the disciples, and in particular to Judas, any impression of Christ's confidence that His cause would in the end be triumphant? Here may be the turning-point in the attitude of Judas from greed and resentment to remorse. He [i.e. Judas] had been absolutely successful; and, at the very moment of his success, his Victim claims, with unruffled assurance, to be

fulfilling the prophecies respecting the Messiah. . . . It is certainly remarkable that Judas is nowhere said to have borne witness against Jesus at any of the trials before the Sanhedrin or Pilate or Herod. And he could have quoted utterances which would have told against Christ in a prejudiced court; e.g. His predictions of His coming again in glory, and of the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem. . . . What was it that withheld him from doing so? Some change apparently had begun.

However, if Judas were already hoping for Jesus' supernatural victory, whereby the betrayer manipulated God's power for his own promotion, he would never desire to testify against Him, only for Him. Hence, Judas could believe in Jesus' victory *as he himself understood it*, but would not change until his own dream were crushed by Jesus' being sentenced to death (27:3).

*Then all the disciples left him, and fled.* These courageous men had not fled. A word from their Commander would unleash their attack. But if they are not permitted to resist Jesus' arrest, they are strangely unneeded. Stunned by His order prohibiting all resistance, they stood paralyzed by His inexplicable inaction. They lost their will to resist because He apparently had none, blindly convinced that Scripture justified the arrest. Since the soldiers were uninterested in the disciples, the temptation to flee now became imperious.

The disciples' abandoning Him appears somewhat less cowardly in light of Jesus' request of the authorities that the disciples should be permitted to go (John 18:8). Further, their flight was less culpable than it was providential, because of what might have happened, had some of them been caught and tried either with Jesus or separately. Stunned more deeply than Simon Peter, they might not have stopped with denying Jesus. They might also have been shocked so irreparably that nothing could have saved them. Like the remorseful Judas, they might not have lived to see the resurrection nor be transformed by its victory. By opening the door for His disciples to leave—whether by precipitate flight or by prudently and quietly fading back into the protective cover of surrounding darkness—Jesus lovingly shielded them. This is one sense in which Jesus' prayer found fuller realization: "Of those whom you gave me, I lost not one" (John 18:9; 17:12).

However, He was abandoned by human friends, God's Lamb in the hands of the wolves. The "scandal" they had earlier repudiated as unthinkable had just taken place, and they abandoned Him. They dismissed His promise to meet them in Galilee, unaware that

it guaranteed their preservation and victory as much as His. As faithfully as he would record any triumph, Matthew records his own dishonorable failure in faith with absolute honesty. He too ran. . . .

What may be learned about ourselves in this section? How short-lived is human steadfastness, even when bolstered by earnest promises! How self-deceptive is the intention to promote one's own happiness while making loud protestation of loyalty to Christ! Religious noises do not equal costly submission to God's will. Of what inconceivable wickedness are even godly men capable!

What may be learned about Jesus? Gone is the spiritual turmoil of His earlier agonizing over the cross. He is possessed by the peace of God that passes understanding. There is not even a hint of rage or contempt in His demeanor. Fully Master of Himself, He reigns as Lord of the situation. He responds to Judas with marvelous mildness. Peter's wild onslaught is halted with remarkable decision. With reasonableness and effectiveness, without bitterness and spite, He exposed this night attack by the authorities as cowardly. Despite every attempt to humiliate Him, His every move reflects the majesty of God and the authority of Scripture in His life. Just as at His baptism, His every move says, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." God's will is the only thing that counts. Barclay (*Matthew*, II,388): ". . . the man who would not fight is enthroned for ever in the hearts of men."

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. State in detail what happened at the arrest of Jesus giving the correct order of the events.
2. How was the arresting force composed? Were Romans involved in it?
3. How did Judas act during the arrest?
4. What was Jesus' reaction to Judas? Explain the meaning of "Friend."
5. In what other ways should we translate "Do that for which thou art come"? Why?
6. How successful was Peter's attack? What did Jesus do about Peter's results?
7. What is the meaning of "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword"?
8. To what Scripture(s) did Jesus allude which were fulfilled by His enemies' ungodly attack on God's Messiah?
9. With what words did Jesus rebuke the arresting party? What did He mean?

## SECTION 69

## JESUS IS "TRIED" BEFORE CAIAPHAS

(Parallels: Mark 14:55-65; Luke 22:63-65; John 18:24)

TEXT: 26:57-68

57 And they that had taken Jesus led him away to the house of Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. 58 But Peter followed him afar off, unto the court of the high priest, and entered in, and sat with the officers, to see the end. 59 Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false witness against Jesus, that they might put him to death; 60 and they found it not, though many false witnesses came. But afterward came two, 61 and said, This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and build it in three days. 62 And the high priest stood up, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? 63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God. 64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven. 65 Then the high priest rent his garments, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy: what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard the blasphemy: 66 what think ye? They answered and said, He is worthy of death. 67 Then did they spit in his face and buffet him: and some smote him with the palms of their hands, 68 saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ: who is he that struck thee?

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why were so many of the Jewish leaders available to meet in the middle of the night?
- b. Do you see any indication in the Gospels that the Jews considered what they were doing in any sense a formal "trial"?
- c. If everyone is so sure Jesus must be put to death, why could no unimpeachable witnesses be found to testify against Him? What does this tell you about (1) the Sanhedrin and priesthood of Israel? (2) about Jesus?

- d. Was it really the authorities' true purpose to find *false* witness? Did they seek no true witnesses at all?
- e. Is there any sense in which the following testimony is true? "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" What part is true and what is false?
- f. Do you think the Sanhedrin would really crucify Jesus for predicting the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem? Should not they simply wait out the fulfillment before acting against Him? How could this charge ever become a lever powerful enough to move Pilate to crucify Him?
- g. Why did the high priest challenge Jesus to speak in His own defense? Was he interested in hearing Jesus' position?
- h. Why did Jesus remain silent during the attacks against Him? Did He not have anything to say? Is not His silence evidence of guilt?
- i. Do you think Caiaphas understood what his own question meant? What do you think he meant by "Christ" and "Son of God"?
- j. Did Jesus admit to being "the Christ, the Son of God"? What did He mean by saying, "You have said so"? Is not this ambiguous? Why not just come out and say "yes" or "no"?
- k. Why did not Jesus work a mighty miracle there in the presence of the Sanhedrin to substantiate His claim to divine Messiahship? Would not this have avoided the charge of blasphemy? Or would the Sanhedrin have accepted this God-given testimony to His true identity and authority?
- l. Jesus asserted that the Sanhedrin would see "the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven. How would this (a) reveal His true identity and right to speak for God? (b) warn those elders of the judgment of God upon them?
- m. How did Jesus' affirmations constitute a basis for their judgment of "blasphemy"? What was there about His statement that in their mind justified this conclusion?
- n. Why did they not need to seek any witnesses after His confession to being the Christ, the Son of God?
- o. How did their judgment that He was guilty of "blasphemy" justify their verdict of death?
- p. How does the demand that Jesus prophesy reveal the beliefs of those who struck Him? Who were they? What were their beliefs?
- q. What does this section teach us about the violent energy of prejudice and party spirit?

- r. Why bother to study the illegal trials of Jesus? Has not the resurrection turned all this into a bad episode that is better forgotten? If so, then, why did the Gospel writers dedicate so much space to Jesus' Passion that someone could describe all the Gospels as "a Passion account preceded by an extremely long introduction"?
- s. What does Jesus' conduct before the Sanhedrin tell you about Him?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then those who seized Jesus led Him away to the residence of the high priest, first to Annas, because he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it was in their interest that one man be sacrificed to save the people.

[At this point John records Jesus' preliminary hearing before Annas (John 18:19-23). Luke teaches that Peter's denials, recorded by the other Synoptics after Jesus' arraignment before the high priests, were taking place simultaneous with it.]

Annas then sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. All the Jewish clergy, the scholars and ruling elders were assembled there. Now the chief priest and the whole Sanhedrin began trying to find evidence against Jesus, however false it might be, on which a death sentence could be based. However, they were not finding any. Even though many "witnesses" volunteered, their statements did not agree. Finally, two came forward to submit this deposition against Him, declaring, "We heard this guy say, 'I can tear down this man-made temple and build another in three days that is not made by man.'" Yet even so, their testimony was conflicting.

So the high priest stood up in his place among the other members of the council and questioned Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this evidence these men bring against you?"

But Jesus remained silent and offered no answer.

Then the high priest demanded point-blank, "I am ordering you on your oath by the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of our Blessed God!"

"That's right: it's just as you say," Jesus replied, "I am! Nevertheless, I can assure you that, in the future, you will all see me, the 'Son of man seated at the right hand' of Almighty God and 'coming on the clouds of heaven.'"

At this point the high priest tore his robes and cried, "He has blasphemed! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, you are all witnesses to His blasphemy! What is your verdict?"

They unanimously condemned Him, "He deserves death!" Now some of the men who were holding Jesus began to make sport of Him, spitting in His face and beating Him with their fists. Some slapped Him. They also blindfolded Him and teased, "Show us you are a prophet, you 'Christ!' Guess who hit you!" Even the guards who took charge of Him, beat Him and made many more insulting remarks against Him.

### SUMMARY

After His capture, Jesus was arraigned before Annas and Caiaphas for questioning. They hoped to establish His guilt upon objective evidence, but despaired of finding any, Caiaphas put Jesus on oath to confess His position. Unequivocally Jesus announced His divine Messiahship before the highest court in the nation. His announcement, however, became the accusation upon which they sentenced Him to death for blasphemy. His captors then began to mistreat their prisoner.

### NOTES

Why study the Passion stories? Has not the resurrection turned them into a bad episode to forget? However, the Gospel writers do not relegate these facts into second place, because the resurrection actually drives us to re-evaluate the Lord's suffering. As we pour over these facts, incredulous, we exclaim: Jesus loved us this much! Further, if in the death of Christ the love of God is made manifest, then our grasp of His magnificence is affected by our grasp of these chapters. It affects the way we think about God. Further, the scandal of the cross affects our self-consciousness as the Church and as individual believers. How do we participate appropriately in the suffering of Christ? (I Peter 2:21ff.; 4:13ff.; Phil. 3:10; II Cor. 1:5ff.; Col. 1:24), unless Christ's way of living and dying becomes our way?

#### 1. THE HEARING BEFORE CAIAPHAS BEGINS

**26:57** And they that had taken Jesus led him away to the house of Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were

**gathered together.** Many note a number of technical violations of Jewish jurisprudence surrounding these hearings (cf. Mishna, *Sanh.* 4.1), illegalities which point to a deliberate intention to deny Jesus basic justice. Sadly, on the basis of these judicial anomalies the accuracy of the Gospels has been questioned on the assumption that our authors deliberately create a story critical to the Jews, since the Sanhedrin must be supposed to have acted in full consciousness of its high duty according to its laws. However, the Synoptics, writing while that high tribunal was yet functioning in Israel, presuppose the notoriety of the facts they recount. Hence theirs is the duty of recounting those details that affect our understanding of Jesus, yet without declaring inexactitudes easily refuted by the well-informed. Again, because opposition to Him did not begin that terrible night, no objection to the historicity of the Gospels can be raised that is not ultimately resolved in harmony with the well-known purpose of Jesus' enemies. (See Farrar's masterful expression, *Life*, 588f.) Again, what may be known of their existing laws comes from later times that may describe the ideal more than the real, what should have been more than what was (Edersheim, *Life*, II,553f.). So, if the Gospels are not to be impugned, should this mockery of justice be dignified with the title of "official trials"? What did these elders of Israel themselves think they were doing? Two positions are possible:

1. **THERE NEVER WAS AN OFFICIAL JEWISH TRIAL.** It might be argued that because the Romans had, with one notable exception (*Wars*, VI,2,4), deprived the Sanhedrin of the power to execute the death sentence (John 18:31; cf. *Wars*, II,8,1; *Ant.* XX,9,1; *Y. Sanhedrin* I,18a.34; 7,24b,41); it is therefore more probable that in capital cases this court practically functioned as would a grand jury. They could examine accusations against Jesus, and if the evidence warranted, bring formal charges on which He could be tried by the Roman judicial system. Accordingly, this Supreme Council was not intending to try Jesus according to their judiciary procedures. Hence, the judicial injustices that are usually mentioned in connection with Jesus' hearings before the Sanhedrin are simply irrelevant. However, the Jews' argument that Pilate's insistence that they try Jesus is pointless (John 18:31), is not merely a demurring on the ground that they are not competent to try capital cases. It implies, rather, that *in some sense they had already officially judged Jesus* and that He must be executed on their findings, hence Pilate's authorization is the only requirement lacking before the already decided execution can occur.

Perhaps the reason they do not stone Jesus outright, as in the case of Stephen (Acts 7) or murder Him as the 40 conspirators planned to do with Paul (Acts 23)—all without Roman blessing—is Jesus' far greater popular support which could touch off riots, if they dared suppress Him with violence.

2. THERE WAS A JEWISH TRIAL OF SORTS but what occurred that night is not its main deliberation, but its culmination. In every segment of the national leadership a groundswell consensus against Jesus had been growing for months. When an objective voice of protest had been raised in the Senate against this railroading, it was ruthlessly stilled (John 7:51). Accordingly, what took place this night was but a final hearing to create a case whereby Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death could be placed on Pilate's shoulders, exonerating the Sanhedrin and priesthood of blame before the people. Witnesses were called, evidence heard and a vote taken to legitimize the proceedings, but no effort was made to follow strict procedure to protect Jesus' rights, since His execution was already a settled matter. However, *did the Hebrew legislation have no appropriate procedure for conducting these hearings?* Finally, the special morning session for the final sentencing is damning evidence of their intention to legitimize their act (27:1 = Mark 15:1 = Luke 22:66—23:1). Whatever may be said about their procedure, the Jewish leaders themselves treated their own acts as official, legitimized by certain apparently indispensable formalities (witnesses, testimony, voting). Even if they are not acting as the Sanhedrin in regular session or even a quorum thereof, it is certainly not as private citizens. So, before Pilate, they argue as representatives of the Jewish people who have already properly investigated, judged and condemned Jesus (John 19:7; cf. 18:30f.).

Therefore, rather than assault the Evangelists' accounts as inaccurate, we should treat these sessions as a religious heresy trial masked as a *preliminary investigation with reference to the Roman trials*. It really counted.

What does it matter, if *no* legal procedure is respected, when the avowed purpose of its perpetrators is not strict adherence to rules of evidence but to eliminate Jesus? Men who instigate a judicial murder are not models of consistency nor quibble over technicalities when they sense victory within their grasp. (Cf. the procedure at Naboth's crooked "trial." I Kings 21:7-14). Was it that they scrupulously

avoided calling it a trial according to the rules, but, by a twisted concession to justice, observed some of the forms to absolve themselves before the nation, if that ever became necessary? By what canon may it be determined that the Sanhedrin under no condition would violate its own judiciary procedure, if a sufficient number of its members considered the eliminating of a dangerous, false Messiah, to be politically more crucial than strict adherence to its own legal conventions?

So, if Jesus' judicial murder were already decided (John 11:45-52), why need a "trial"? Because they must yet formulate some official justification that would satisfy the people and secure the indispensable cooperation of Pilate. To justify to the Jewish people the arraignment of a Hebrew before a Roman court, they must first judge and excommunicate him as a transgressor of Jewish law.

*Caiaphas* and the other authorities were not the first to question Jesus, since John clearly names Annas, the political boss and deposed high priest (cf. *Ant.* XX,9,2), as the man before whom the first preliminary hearing took place (18:13ff.; cf. Luke 3:2; Acts 4:6 calls Annas "high priest"). Perhaps this semi-private, unofficial hearing aimed at uncovering some line of accusation or juridical pretext that would sway the Sanhedrin. Further, this examination gained time to assemble both the witnesses and jurors. Without getting much satisfaction, Annas then sent Him bound to his son-in-law, *Caiaphas the high priest* (John 18:24). Apparently this palace complex was constructed around a central courtyard open to the sky, surrounded by the various apartments on different floors (cf. *aulé*, 26:58, 69; Luke 22:55). If Annas and *Caiaphas* lived in separate apartments in the same building, this move could be easily accomplished without going out into the street of the City. Peter and the others remained in the same courtyard for the second hearing (26:58; John 18:15f., 28).

*Caiaphas the high priest . . . the scribes and the elders were gathered together.* (See notes on 26:3.) Even if the language might admit of a few exceptions (were Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea summoned?), this constitutes "the whole council" (*tò sunèdrion hòlon*, 26:59). For this closed session they are not met in regular court session in their official council chamber, as they would next day (Luke 22:66), but *in the capacity of Sanhedrin members acting as a more or less official caucus* (Matt. 26:59). Matthew and Mark report the substance of this main session, without repeating it during the "official ratification" next day in the regular meeting-place of the Sanhedrin (27:1 = Mark 15:1 = Luke 22:66).

Does "the whole council" stand for an official quorum of 23? (Bemidb. R.1, cited by Edersheim, *Life*, II,555.) Although the Sanhedrin was composed of 71 members, to decide a death sentence, the presence of 23 judges was sufficient. Some would exonerate the gentler Pharisees from the injustices perpetrated. Flusser (*Jesus*, 159, citing *Mishna Sanh.* 4,1; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XX,9,1) argued that a Sadducee-packed quorum could have sentenced Jesus to death whereas the more equitable Pharisees would have brought about the dismissal of the high priest, Annas, claiming that this Sanhedrin session was illegal, having been called without the governor's consent. This bypasses the following considerations:

1. In his case cited it appears that Flusser overstates his case by giving Pharisees this honor, but, granted his conclusion, it would not prove Pharisean favor to Christ, because the case cited served purely political interests of the Pharisees by putting the Sadducees in disfavor with Rome and proved themselves better subjects of Caesar than the high priest.
2. The arresting party was also sent by the Pharisees (John 18:3). The Pharisees were alarmed about a supposed "faked resurrection plot" (Matt. 27:62). Did they abandon their cause during the hearings?
3. Luke calls the morning session "the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together with the chief priests and scribes" (*sunéchte tò presbutérion toû laou, archiereîs te kai grammateîs*). Cf. Luke's use of *sunédriou*, Acts 4:15; 5:21, 27, 34, 41; 6:12, 15; 22:30; 23:1, 6, 15, 20, 28; 24:20, as a general expression for the Supreme Sanhedrin of Israel. Mark has: "the chief priests and the elders and scribes and [*kai* = even?] the whole council." By what logic would Pharisees have been excluded from this?
4. Nor can it be concluded that absence of all reference to the Pharisees in the trial of Jesus meant that "they were too small a minority to have an effective role in the courts, least of all in the Great Sanhedrin." (So Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*, 42.) Does not this completely underestimate the influence of the great Gamaliel (Acts 5:34ff.)? Further, if the Sadducees must follow the traditions of the Pharisees, then were not these latter a highly influential part of that body that must decide on points of law and tradition? *Mishna Yom.* 1.8 [= *Bab. Talm. Yoma* 19b; = *Pal. Talm.*

Yoma 1.5] Acts 23:6-10) The Pharisees dominated the national leadership from early times. (*Ant.* XIII,15,5—16,2 [= *Wars* I,5,1-3] = 78 B.C.; XVII,2,4 = before 4 B.C.; XVIII,1,4 = *idem.*) The bitter hatred of the Pharisees induced them to cooperate with their natural enemies, the Sadducees and the Herodians, to eliminate Jesus (cf. Mark 3:6; John 7:32, 47ff.; 11:57).

That the wiser, more conscientious elders on this high tribunal should have been present and sentenced Jesus to death without raising a single dissenting voice, thus perpetrating this gross violation of justice, is not incredible. The consideration that His elimination in the name of national peace was the less of two evils may have anesthetized the conscience of stricter observers of the Law or of any friends Jesus may have had in the council (John 11:50).

*Gathered:* awaiting the arrival of Jesus after His arrest. That there were so many people available to meet all night long, if necessary to curcify Jesus, should come as no surprise.

1. These men listed are assembled in the crucial session that must conclude the final, authoritative judgment on the Nazarene. Because the ring-leaders are determined to sentence Him to death, they will stop at nothing until their goal is reached. The others recognize the national emergency involved (John 11:45ff.).
2. But that many others, not directly connected with the hierarchy, could be convoked at will, was possible, because *every night of the year* 240 Levites and 30 priests were on guard duty in the Temple (Edersheim, *Temple*, 148-151). Caiaphas could have tapped any one of these for "special duties," should the need arise for false witnesses or mob scenes in this judiciary farce. Edersheim (*ibid.*) wrote,

Perhaps it was on this ground that, on the morning of the Passover, they who led Jesus from Caiaphas thronged so 'early' 'the judgment-hall of Pilate.' Thus, while some of them would be preparing the Temple to offer the morning sacrifice, others were at the same moment unwittingly fulfilling the meaning of that very type, when He on whom was 'laid the iniquity of us all' was 'brought as a lamb to the slaughter.'

## 2. PETER ENTERS THE COURTYARD TO OBSERVE

26:58 This verse will be treated in connection with the next section because it relates directly to Peter's denials.

## 3. THEY SEEK VAINLY FOR WITNESSES

26:59 **Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false witness against Jesus, that they might put him to death.** Because divisions among the Jewish parties in the Sanhedrin made confusion in technical procedure inevitable, a clear-cut and unified legal definition of Jesus' guilt was not simple. Consequently, they must cast about to obtain a sufficient consensus on a commonly acceptable charge.

They *sought false witness*? Some suggest that they consciencelessly coached paid "witnesses" to falsify the evidence. If they paid Judas, why not also others? But was this predicable of *the whole council*? From their own point of view, were they not, rather, seeking evidence that appeared plausible enough to stand up in court? However, because their purpose is to secure a death sentence, regardless of the facts, they must seek evidence however flimsy to sustain it. They already had their conclusion: *that they might put him to death*. But, because there was public opinion and a Roman procurator to content, they were now seeking a procedural foundation on which to establish it. This, says Matthew, is tantamount to seeking *false witness*. That they sought *any* witness points to their attempt to give an appearance of legality, hence points to a trial, even if it bypasses almost every rule of their jurisprudence.

The unanimous verdict reached by this session is suspect because no sincere effort was expended to investigate objectively. (Cf. Deut. 19:18.) Why did not they have at least one defender to serve as "Devil's Advocate" to question the majority opinion and speak on behalf of the accused? But this is the injustice of prejudice.

26:60 **and they found it not, though many false witnesses came. But afterward came two.** The Law required at least two consistent witnesses (Deut. 17:6; 19:15). That the critical minds of these theological lawyers *found it not, though many false witnesses came*, is a marvel, because Jesus had been such a prominent, public figure constantly exposed to the careful scrutiny of thousands. They were slightly unsuccessful for several reasons:

1. Consistent *false witnesses* did not exist. His opposition simply could not uncover two men who could testify to a single fault

worthy of the death sentence. This becomes striking presumptive evidence of His innocence. Jesus' challenge to Annas was not helpless flailing but logical and extremely appropriate:

"I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing secretly. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them. They know what I said" (John 18:19-23).

But, because the closed-minded authorities are interested not in truth but in a legal smokescreen that assures the cross for the Nazarene, none of the multitudes would be called to testify. Only those witnesses whose loyalty to the Sanhedrin remained unquestioned could be permitted to testify.

2. *They found it not*, because they must construct a doubly solid case not only according to Jewish jurisprudence to satisfy Jewish public opinion, but that would also stand up in court and convince the Roman governor. It was this kind of false testimony that they could not find, even though many would-be witnesses came forward.
3. Further, the conflict in the witnesses may testify to their own deep uncertainty as to what kind of charge to bring against Him and whether He could be proven to be a rebel against the central authority, despite the authorities' own seriously divided conflicts of interpretation. This uncertainty would lead to the kind of exploratory debate and conflict that kept the witnesses from agreeing, leading to a serious difficulty in obtaining a consensus.

On what basis can they objectively avoid condemnation for a blatant violation of ancient law because they do not punish these who witness falsely against Jesus (Deut. 19:16-21)?

One witness whom they could have called, but who did not offer his own testimony against Christ, was still lurking in the shadows to see how this trial would end. Were there anything compromising in Jesus' doctrine or character that could be alleged against Him as proof that He was nothing but an imposter, Judas Iscariot could have furnished that evidence. But this man who knew Him so well and even turned Him over to His enemies, could not and would not accuse Him of anything wrong, even though his testimony would have vindicated his betrayal. Judas' silence is no proof of Jesus' innocence, because Iscariot's motives undermine his testimony. He

could support a magical Messiah who, despite character defects and doctrinal irregularities, enriched him. (Cf. notes on 26:14, 25, 48-50.) However, his silence indicates that his motives had not been revenge. As far as Judas is concerned, his participation in this crisis has ended. However tardy, he testified to Jesus' innocence (27:3f.).

*But afterward came two*, the legal minimum. Were these two priests who had challenged Jesus' first purification of the Temple (John 2:18f.)?

26::61 and said, **This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and build it in three days.** Many see this deposition as (1) deliberately twisted to make Jesus' true statement appear dangerous, or (2) a different version based on their misunderstanding. Paradoxically, however, Jesus could actually have said this, without meaning, naturally, what these two witnesses thought He meant. In fact, this is a free paraphrase of His declaration at the first Temple cleansing (John 2:19). But as on that occasion the Jews thought that He meant the Herodian Temple still under construction, even so now these false witnesses assume He meant that same structure. In fact, Mark's version more clearly reflects their understanding: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands'" (Mark 14:58). However, His predictions of Jerusalem's fall and the destruction of the temple could also cause the two strains of Temple-prophecy to be blended in men's minds, whereas Jesus referred to two separate objects: the destruction of the Temple and His own death and resurrection (Luke 19:41-44; Matt. 22:7; 23:36-39). Their witness is still *false* because of their added inferences, even if not intentionally wrong as to form.

The great irony of their accusations is that they were substantially correct, even if misunderstood and perhaps somewhat garbled. For if, by *the temple of God*, Jesus intended God's dwelling on earth in its ideal, highest sense, He referred to His own body in which all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily, (Col. 2:9; 1:19; cf. John 2:21), then He conclusively proved that He was able to lay down His life ("*destroy this temple of God*") and take it up again ("*rebuild it in three days*") (John 10:17f.). And, in His resurrection, not only did He *build it in three days*, but He made possible the construction of an indestructible *temple of God*, formed out of living stones for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:21f., I Peter 2:5).

Thus, if Jesus really did say (as Mark quotes the false witnesses): "temple made with hands . . . another not made with hands," He really did effect this as well. With His death and resurrection our Lord brought to an end the Old Covenant with its earthly temple under construction for already more than 46 years (John 2:20). It would be 40 years more before that building were demolished. Nevertheless, its relation to the program of God ended with the cross. The new, gloriously spiritual Temple, the Church, became an instant possibility when Jesus conquered death (John 2:21f.). Because God dwelt in Him, the new Temple was erected instantly and permanently. Now, in the Church, which was born shortly thereafter, God dwells in all who are in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26f.; Eph. 2:19ff.; Rom. 8:1; Col. 2:10). This Church is "made without hands," just as He is reported to have predicted! (Cf. Dan. 2:34f., 44f.)

The accusation of hostility to the Temple made sense, because, if it could be established that Jesus repudiated the centrality of the Temple and, by implication, its authority, He could be tried as a rebel. Further, the Romans had an interest in assuring the protection of holy places in the Empire as a guarantee of the stability of law and order among the peoples who worshiped thereat. From the political standpoint, therefore, if this accusation proved well-founded, Caiaphas would have a telling capital accusation with which to consign Jesus over to the Roman procurator. Had not Jesus openly attacked the Temple monopoly twice (John 2:13ff.; Matt. 21:12ff.)? If proven, the quoted threat was potentially plausible ground for a capital case with the Romans.

Then, too, His absurd claim to be able to rebuild the Temple in three days smacked of an assertion to possess superhuman power, which, in turn, borders on sacrilege. This consideration may have suggested to Caiaphas another approach to try, the claim of deity, as a more likely accusation with which to eliminate Him (26:63).

#### 4. THE HIGH PRIEST QUESTIONS JESUS UNDER OATH

**26:62 And the high priest stood up, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee?** The agitated pontiff leaped to his feet because he realized that these unprovable and judicially unpunishable declarations are the worst that can be alleged against the Nazarene.

1. The foregoing evidence was so insufficient, distorted and contradictory that no solid conclusion could be based on it. The case could not rest on such flimsy testimony. If the judges themselves remained unconvinced, how could they persuade Pilate?!
2. Jesus' so-called "threat" to destroy the Temple was a reckless boast at worst and certainly not yet fact, i.e. still in the realm of prophecy, hence could not yet serve as a basis of final incrimination. Further, His zeal for the purity of God's Temple, recently expressed in its purification, undermined any supposed intention on His part to destroy it (21:12f.). Again, His promise to rebuild the Temple, while absurd if He could not do it, could be thought to testify against His reputed repudiation of it as a permanent institution.
3. The normal, instinctive reaction of an undefended accused person would be self-defense.

Perhaps the Nazarene could be induced to give the damning evidence inadvertently Himself. The priest's baited question means: "Are you going to give no justification or explanation for these pretentious words attributed to you? Does not this accumulation of testimony deserve a reply?" But this pretense of fairness in offering an opportunity for self-defense against apparently ruinous, unshakable testimony is an ill-disguised trap leading Jesus to self-incrimination. Caiaphas is not simply presiding now but manipulating the session to achieve his own declared purpose (John 11:45-53).

All of the malice of His enemies could not bring forward any sin against Him. Their best effort was a misunderstood repetition of a figurative statement. He must die, if at all, for His most majestic claim, which, proven true by His resurrection, vindicated His life and authorized His teaching.

**26:63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God.**

*Jesus held his peace:* Although Jesus may have been able to ignore the more absurd accusations, surely the temptation to respond to and correct misunderstandings of His teachings would have been sorely felt. Here is impressive proof of Jesus' total self-mastery. (Cf. Heb. 12:3; Isa. 53:7.) Though He had the right to answer His accusers, He declined to exercise that right. The key to our Lord's majestic, disciplined silence here may be the combination of various factors:

1. His keen awareness that the real issue is not whether or not He had said this or that. The real question is His *identity* and His consequent right to say *anything* that God wants said.
2. His confidence that the Father, in time and history, would interpret His teaching correctly and prove His claims well-founded. Rather than demand His rights through violent self-assertion, He would achieve His victory through meek self-denial.
3. His certainty that a fair trial was not to be expected. The purpose of this "trial" is not to clear the innocent and punish the guilty, but to punish the innocent and save the guilty. To correct their willed misconceptions is hopelessly useless.
4. His accusers were actually self-defeated, hopelessly entangling themselves in their own unbased accusations and consequently refuting each other's testimony.

*I adjure thee by the living God:* "I put you on your oath by the living God." Jesus does not quibble with the fuming pontiff about the rightness of swearing in court before the national tribunal. Rather, He tacitly accepts the formulation and proceeds to speak as under oath before God and these witnesses. He does this without any mental reservation about swearing, because He always spoke everything He ever said in the full awareness that His Father is ever present and hears all. His example, then, is proof that swearing is not evil in all circumstances. (See notes on 5:33-37.)

Further, in obedience to God, He must give testimony in court even if it is self-incriminating. (Cf. Lev. 5:1; see Joshua's application of this: Josh. 7:19.) This does not violate the rule that "one witness is no witness" (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15), because, as Caiaphas observes, by His utterance He made them all witnesses. If there were a juridical principle in Mosaic legislation whereby the accused must not be compelled to incriminate Himself, Jesus waived His privilege and chose to testify.

*Tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God.* Caiaphas knew that Jesus' offence lay, so far as jurisdiction was concerned, in His approach to authority, because in numerous ways He claimed direct authority and power from God. His debates turned on whether He were God's Son and authorized representative or not (John 5:17f., 21-28; 6:29-59; 8:24, 46f., 51, 58; 10:30-38; 12:44ff.). Caiaphas could also guess that, whatever Pilate thought of Jesus' concept of Messiahship, the governor would recognize that, to let Him continue a proclamation which so radically challenged fundamental concepts

of the Jewish system, meant that He could disrupt the delicate balance among the holders of political and religious power in Israel. Hence, Pilate could sense a political threat. So, if the Galilean could be induced to repeat His claims in court, He could be crucified for sacrilege and rebellion.

That Caiaphas had to resort to this blunt procedure establishes several things all favorable to Jesus:

1. It proves how desperate he was to find some telling evidence on which to establish the death sentence. The clumsy prosecution has failed, and Caiaphas knows it.
2. It measured how completely Jesus' imperturbable calm nettled the cunning priest. There was really nothing to criticize in His dignified behavior under fire, even though it thwarted their purpose and plotting.
3. It suggests how well-established and thoroughly embarrassing to them were His majestic miracles. Each miracle inevitably brought only glory to God and blessing to men or was connected with some grand Messianic declaration or claim to Deity and established His right to make those declarations. So, to bring up *any* of His claims was a tremendous risk for Caiaphas, because to do so would inevitably bring up also the unquestionably supernatural proof of their validity.

*The Christ, the Son of God.* Old Testament passages revealed the divinity of *the Christ* (Ps. 2:7; Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Zech. 12:10; 13:7; cf. Dan. 7:13f.). So, if the charge of blasphemy is to be based on a human claim to equality with God with divine authority and rights, then the terms of Caiaphas' question must be somewhat equivalent, even if some Jews failed to equate them.

That Caiaphas, in this night session, formulated his question so that *Christ* and *the Son of God* refer to the same person, whereas in the formal morning trial these terms are separated into two distinct questions (Luke 22:67, 70), does not prove we have two contradictory reports of one questioning. In the night trial Caiaphas is more succinct, combining the two potentially separate claims into one self-incriminating answer. In the morning the court proceeded successive steps to establish an unshakable conviction of Jesus' guilt.

To be *the Son of God* is tantamount to being "equal with God" (John 5:18). Were *the Son of God* merely a Jewish paraphrase for

*the Christ*, they could not have accused Jesus of blasphemy. The claim to be the Messiah was, alone, not strictly punishable with death nor considered blasphemy per se. This claim, even if proven groundless, did not sully the honor of God. But to claim to be *Son of God* meant deity, and, if untrue, was blasphemy. Jesus claimed it, they reject it and Jesus does not correct their understanding. They understood Him, and He them. Unquestionably, Caiaphas formulated this last-ditch challenge, knowing that Jesus made these claims (John 5:17f.; 10:30-39; Matt. 21:37-46; 22:41-46). He thus forced Him to repeat them before the council to convince them of the charge that must unequivocally lead to His condemnation for blasphemy.

That Jesus will go on trial before Pilate for His confession to being *the Son of God* does not come out in the early stages of Pilate's interrogations. Nonetheless, this claim was a key issue on which a later phase of the trial turned, because Pilate, upon hearing this claim, lost his nerve (John 19:7f.). Unquestionably, the Jews did not unveil this issue in the original charges, because such a claim could bring only a laugh from the hardened Roman, not a death sentence. However, launched at the appropriate moment, it shook the governor. His claim to be *the Christ* offered a more volatile issue with politically dangerous overtones which would instantly carry substantially more weight with the Procurator.

## 5. JESUS CONFESSES HIS DEITY AND MESSIAHSHIP

26:64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven. The appropriate answer to unjust accusations and crumbling testimony had been silence earlier. Now, because the truth is at stake, silence would be a denial of His true identity on which everything else hinged. To affirm His deity with clarity and conviction would offer the testimony which these men needed to hear, not merely to convict Him, but to be told that truth, His Messianic self-consciousness, for which He was willing to die. During His public ministry, because of common misconceptions of Messiahship, He had maintained His Messianic reserve, often masking His true identity in public and avoiding publicity. Now, however, all reserve must give way to unhesitating affirmation before the competent authorities of His people. Of all His public declarations, this is the most decisive, emphatic affirmation.

His answer is a model of succinctness, because He could have argued His case, citing miracles without end. Instead, His statements are three, composed of His initial confession followed by two supporting statements:

1. *Thou hast said* (*sùeipas*) expresses a sense of reservation about the affirmation: "The words are yours." Blass-Debrunner (§441, 3) note the emphasis on the personal pronoun (*sù*):

"You say it yourself, not I" (§277,1, for emphasis or other contrast) in which there is always something of an implication that the statement would not have been made had the question not been asked. . . . Cf. Matt. 27:11; 26:25; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; in John 18:37 *sù légeis, hòti* (not 'that,' but 'because, for,' . . . *basileùs eimi*, cf. Luke 22:70 *humefs légete, hòti egò eimi*).

*With this Arndt-Gingrich (225) substantially agree: "As an answer sù eipas sc. autò = you have said it = Yes. (Bl-D . . . §331,3. Not a simple affirmative ans., but one that is forced: Const. Apost. 15,14,4 ouk eipen hò kùrios 'nai', all'hòti 'su eipas'."* However, what should be made of Mark's version with its unequivocal answer, *egò eimi*? (See below.)

The *you have said* must not be misinterpreted to suggest that Jesus' confession of His own Messiahship was unclear and equivocal. Rather, because the concepts of Christhood and divine Sonship in the mind of the high priest and of the Sanhedrin were as unclear and equivocal as those held by so many others in the first century who were ignorant of God's true planning, with respect to Caiaphas' formulation Jesus MUST formally demur. The content of the high priest's words—as the Sanhedrin understood them—may not precisely coincide with the content of Jesus' confession. Nevertheless, lest anyone conclude that He were *not* "the Christ, the Son of God" in *any* sense, He could not actually say "no" to Caiaphas' formulation. Hence, before saying, "Yes, I am," He lodged a mild objection based on His own well-founded doubt about the acceptability of the formulation proposed. This He did in the well-known words, "*You have said*. The words are yours; however, yes, in a sense that you have not understood and with reservations about what you think these terms mean, yes, I am the Christ, the Son of God."

To affirm that *Thou hast said* is an idiom for "I am" is not proved by Mark 14:62. Mark's version simply eliminates the subtle reservation Jesus expressed, and gives His general meaning. For Mark's presumably Gentile readership, the Messianic concept would be less garbled by Jewish nationalism than for Matthew's Jewish audience for whom Jesus' mild taking exception would be especially edifying, hence reported verbatim.

*Thou hast said*, however, does not mean "You yourself affirm what is true," as if Jesus saw an unconscious or unwilling tribute to His divine authority and identity in the words of *the very man whose denial of it drove him relentlessly to crucify Jesus*. Caiaphas fully understood what he meant by his own question and repudiated Jesus' claim to being anything near what Caiaphas thought his question meant.

Further, the violent reaction of the high priest (v. 65) and of the court is fully justified from their own view, only if we correctly understand Jesus' answer to be unequivocally positive because sustained by the comment that follows it. It is highly unlikely that the Jewish clergy would have cried "Sacrilege!" or "Blasphemy!" if their Prisoner's total answer ultimately hid behind ambiguities.

*Nevertheless* continues His mild objection to mistaken connotations in the popular use of these terms. Rather than simply admit to being the *Christ* in any political revolutionary sense, Jesus proceeded to interpret His Messiahship in terms of God's definitions. He knew quite clearly what He was doing, because in refining His answer, He went even further than the priest asked.

*Henceforth ye shall see*: from this moment at the beginning of His suffering they could discern His royal Lordship by His accession to the Throne. This glorification actually began with His betrayal (John 13:31). The manifestation of the triumph and Lordship of Jesus was even then becoming evident in the world, and needs not await some eschatological realization at the end of the world, for it had already begun with His Passion. Rather than defeat Him, His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension represent the very means of His accession to power and glory. His earthly humiliation is about over: the way of the cross leads home. Shortly, He would return to the Father, the Holy Spirit would

be given, His Church would be started and the Jewish State would live to see the vindication of Jesus' daring claims!

*Henceforth ye shall see:* Jesus' sustaining argument, that demonstrates the truthfulness of His former claim, is composed of two unquestionably Messianic Scriptures. (For further notes, see my Vol. II, pp. 446-449: "The Coming of the Son of Man." See notes on 24:29-31.)

2. *the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power* (Ps. 110:1). This masterful concept of a *Man* seated on God's glorious throne as supreme King and Judge of all the world is the sort of self-consciousness one would expect of someone who considered Himself the Lord's Elect, the Servant of Jahveh, His own unique Son who alone knows the Father. It is this very self-awareness of His own deity that gave Him the courage, when on trial for His life, to identify Himself unequivocally as the Messianic *Son of man*. *The right hand of Power* is an idiomatic Hebrew paraphrase for "God's almighty right hand."
3. *the Son of man . . . coming on the clouds of heaven* (Dan. 7:13ff.). This refers to Jesus' ascension and incoronation. For this concept, see full notes on 24:29-31 esp. 30. That this has nothing to do with the Second Coming is established by Jesus' time-schedule: *henceforth you shall see*. . . . They would not have to wait in line two millennia to get a glimpse of it.

Because in Daniel *the Son of man comes TO GOD* to receive His Kingdom and He must rule, as David writes, until His triumph is absolute and total, Jesus prophesies His exaltation and triumph over His enemies.

Thus, just as before Pilate Jesus declared Himself to be the King of a Kingdom not of this world (John 19:36f.), so also before the high priest He declared Himself to be *the Son of man*, God's universal King of whom Daniel spoke. Jesus prophesied that they would live to see the fulfillment of these prophetic truths realized in Himself. Unless they repented, their roles would rapidly be reversed: He would be their King and Judge; they the judged. His heavenly glorification would eclipse them in every way, and His vindication exclude them from that glorious Kingdom which He coming must usher in. This dramatic vindication occurred just forty years later when He poured out terrible, punitive judgment on them, their City and their Temple.

With the crucifixion, they would suppose the Nazarene question closed. Instead, not four days later the religious clique discovered

they had not heard the last of Jesus of Nazareth. Less than two months later, shaken by a flourishing spiritual movement that threatened their religious hegemony, they arraigned before their council a couple of ex-fisherman, saying to them, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and are determined to make us guilty of this Man's death" (Acts 5:28). What is the significance of this complaint? The Sanhedrin and the priesthood were just beginning to reckon with Jesus the Christ ascended to the throne of the universe. Everything they attempted to stop His growing movement utterly failed. He had won. And His victory song went on. . . .

The Apostles hammered on this concept (Acts 2:33-36; 3:13; 5:31f.; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3f., 13; 10:12f.; I Peter 3:22). The Christians found their hope and power in it (Acts 4:24ff.; 7:55). As they went through their trials, they looked up, not only for the coming of Christ, but to the Christ now reigning in heavenly majesty.

## 6. JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH FOR BLASPHEMY

26:65 **Then the high priest rent his garments, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy: what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard the blasphemy.** Jesus had neither yielded nor evaded, but His confession turned the course of the trial. *Rent his garments*: among Orientals this was the customary way of expressing extreme shock, dismay and indignation. This was accomplished by gripping the garment at the neck in front and tearing it a bit. May we not judge our own sense of God's high holiness by how profoundly we are shocked by a blatant case of treating God with disrespect? (Cf. Isa. 36:22 where men appropriately tore their clothes at hearing blasphemy; cf. 1 Macc. 11:71; Josephus, *Wars*, II,15,4; Acts 14:14.) *Rent his garments*, i.e., not his official dress, which was worn during his official functions as high priest, but his personal "clothes" (pl. *himàtia*; *chitônas*, Mark 14:63) as president of the Council. Although a high priest was prohibited from expressing personal grief in this way (Lev. 21:10), he protests in his official position against what he considers blasphemy (*Sanhedrin* 7,5). According to Rabbinical rules the judges must be "standing on their feet, rend their garments and not sew them up again" (*P.H.C.*, XXII,587).

So, in theory, the high priest was expressing holy grief at this profanation of the honor and holiness of God. In reality, however,

because Jesus' self-incrimination was more thorough than expected, Caiaphas was neither grieved nor shocked, but greatly relieved at surpassing so easily what had appeared an impossible obstacle. Inwardly he was fiercely jubilant. With imitation horror and hidden malice the cunning Caiaphas prejudiced the Council vote by his dramatic cry of *blasphemy!*

*What further need have we of witnesses?* The previous trouble with conflicting witnesses is now obviated. The whole council is now itself a witness to Jesus' assertions, hence all of them could now testify to the nation as to the crime for which the Nazarene would die. Paradoxically, they had found but one faithful Witness (Rev. 3:14). Although they repudiated His testimony, yet they intended to sentence Him on the basis of His word alone!

*Blasphemy:* For a man not to substantiate His claims to divinity when on trial for His life is to stand self-convicted. But they ignore how many hundreds of times Jesus had already validated His Messiahship and divine Sonship by incontestable supernatural proof during His ministry (John 7:31; 10:38; 12:37; 14:10f.). Since all previous evidence in favor of Jesus is excluded a priori, only what occurs at this trial counts. However, they suppose they must judge Him here and now on the sole basis of arguments in the trial. So, His present answer is treated as an assertion unsupported by immediately evident proof. Lacking this support, His judges must pronounce it *blasphemy*. So Jesus is defeated in the eyes of His enemies. By claiming to be, in some sense, divine, He appeared to attack the basic tenet of Israel: monotheism, for how could there be but one God (Deut. 6:4), if He were somehow God too? This realization would strike the unthinking unbeliever with tremendous impact.

However, the issue is clear: either Jesus was divine or He was not. If He was not, He spoke blasphemy and deserved to be condemned. If He spoke the truth, He was God's Son and they deserve death who condemned Him. If He lied, it was the greatest folly ever committed because done in full awareness that this deception would send Him to the cross. If false, we could perhaps excuse His claim as that of a deluded fanatic. However, if His claim to be divine is true, do we worship Him?

**26:66 What think ye? They answered and said, He is worthy of death.** The triumphant Caiaphas charged the obsequious jury to do its duty. Ramming through a quick voice vote, he finally obtained his consensus of action in this unanimous verdict (Mark 14:64). Since

*death* was the normal penalty for blasphemy (Lev. 24:15f.), for being a false prophet (Deut. 18:20), a seducer (Deut. 13) or a rebel (Deut. 17:12), Jesus had no chance and could be considered *worthy of death*, indicted on whatever count His enemies found pragmatically successful. Formal sentencing would follow early the next morning (27:1 = Luke 22:66ff.). That later trial simply marks this one as informal and exploratory in character and its test vote the expression of a legal opinion. Even if not the formal *de jure* determination of the Sanhedrin met in regular session, Jesus' condemnation and death were the *de facto* product of its members. They expressed the decision and aims of a significant cross section of Israel's leadership and its supreme tribunal. (See on 26:3.)

Their superficial judgment is totally incomprehensible, if we suppose that they condemned Jesus for claiming to be a Messiah on the strictly political level, for there were later, openly political messiahs in abundance whom the Sanhedrin did not bring to trial as they did Jesus. (See on 24:4f., 11, 23-26. Was that only because those political messiahs were so often halted by Roman might, hence the Sanhedrin did not have to deal with them?) On the contrary, Jesus' claim to Messiahship consisted in supernatural identity, His claim to be the Son of God. In this *He was a threat to them.*

## 7. FRENZIED DISPLAY OF HATRED

**26:67 Then did they spit in his face and buffet him: and some smote him with the palms of their hands:** Since their Prisoner had not defended Himself by a devastating display of supernatural might, they viewed Him as innocuous and their courage returned. Before covering His face, *they spit in his face.* To the legal injustice they add insult and shame. (Cf. Num. 12:14; Deut. 25:9; Job 30:10.)

Who really abused Jesus? *They* points to the Sanhedrists, whereas Luke 22:63 mentions the guards. But the latter did not have Jesus yet, because "they received him with blows" after the Councilors themselves had begun the mocking (Mark 14:65). However, it matters little, because the shameless brutality of their lackeys proved they had the full approval of their masters. These savagely attack their defenseless Victim. This inhumanity shames those who showed it, not Him who tolerated it.

**26:68 saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ: who is he that struck thee?** Without a piece of information from Luke's Gospel (22:64),

some unfriendly critics might judge this sentence a piece of absurdity, since if the smiter were then standing before Jesus, what purpose could he have had in taunting Jesus by challenging: "Tell us who struck you!" Luke, however, reports that they had blindfolded Jesus to keep Him from seeing who His attackers were. McGarvey (*Evidences of Christianity*, 92) wrote:

If Matthew had been making up his story, he would probably have been on his guard against such omissions; but as he was conscious of writing only the truth, he left his statement to take care of itself.

Did the Jews cover their Prisoner's face to symbolize the death sentence? (Cf. Mark 14:65; Esth. 7:8.) If so, this would rationalize the blindfolding by His tormentors. This man had claimed to be a prophet. Let him prove it. Because He could not see who hit Him, any faked prophecy would be impossible, if He were no real prophet. *Thou Christ* sneers at His Messianic claims in much the same way the Romans insulted Jesus by allusion to His supposedly political position (27:27-29).

Jesus chose to ignore these challenges, not because He could not prophesy, but because this was not the time for proof and answers but for death and reconciliation. He tolerated far more than these insulting gestures and painful blows. As Edersheim (*Life*, II,562) put it:

. . . these insults, taunts, and blows which fell upon that lonely Sufferer, not defenseless, but undefending, not vanquished, but uncontenting, not helpless, but majestic in voluntary self-submission for the highest purpose of love—have not only exhibited the curse of humanity, but also removed it by letting it descend on Him, the Perfect Man, the Christ, the Son of God.

But, ironically, to accept this suffering is not the mere exercise of moral grandeur that dwarfed those who thus abused Him. In a world gone awry where the purest of the race is mocked, for Him to suffer is to triumph, because God's plan, salvation made possible by His death as an atonement for sins, is progressing right on schedule. Again, He took this cruel mockery not merely because it too was foreseen in prophecy (Ps. 22:6f.; Isa. 50:6; 52:14; 53:3). Unjustly accused, unfairly tried and unkindly insulted, Jesus bore the unjust accusations, the unfair trial and the unkindly insults patiently, because He was committed to US. It was because He was committed to do God's will

that He loved us so. This same “divine toughness” can be ours, to the degree to which we turn ourselves over to God in the same way He did: “Not my will, but yours be done.”

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. According to what logical procedure would it be normal for Jesus to be taken first to Annas, as John says, rather than to Caiaphas, as the Synoptics report? What prior right(s) did Annas possess?
2. What was the difference between this session before Caiaphas and the one before Annas recorded by John (John 18:19-23)? How does it differ from that of Luke (22:66f.)?
3. Who constituted this jury that judged Jesus' case? What reasons justified each man's or group's opposition to Jesus?
4. State briefly what was charged against Jesus at this stage of His trial. What is the fundamental accusation back of all the Sanhedrin's deliberations that justifies their resistance to Jesus?
5. Were the witnesses against Jesus at His trials few or many? What was the character of the witnesses who came forward?
6. On what occasion(s) did Jesus affirm what they report?
7. In what way does this Synoptic's report of the false testimony about the destruction of the temple corroborate the testimony of John?
8. Did Jesus answer any of their accusations? If so, which and how?
9. Was there anything illegal about the high priest's putting Jesus on oath to speak: 'I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God'? Prove your answer.
10. What was Jesus' reply? What is the source and meaning of the language He used?
11. What is meant by Caiaphas' tearing his clothes?
12. Define “blasphemy” as this is used by the Sanhedrin to describe Jesus' crime. Then, show why Jesus was not guilty as charged.
13. What was the Mosaic punishment for blasphemy and for being a false prophet? Where are these laws stated? (book and chapter)
14. What sentiment is expressed by spitting in Jesus' face? Who did it?
15. On the basis of what specific law did the rulers decide Jesus must die?
16. List every evidence of Jesus' moral stature as His trial before Caiaphas reveals this:

## SECTION 70

## JESUS IS DENIED BY PETER

(Parallels: Mark 14:54, 66-72; Luke 22:54-62;  
John 18:15-18, 25-27)

TEXT: 26:58, 69-75

58 But Peter followed him afar off, unto the court of the high priest, and entered in, and sat with the officers, to see the end.

.....

69 Now Peter was sitting without in the court: and a maid came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilean. 70 But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. 71 And when he was gone out into the porch, another *maid* saw him, and saith unto them that were there, This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth. 72 And again he denied with an oath, I know not the man. 73 And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter, Of a truth thou also are *one* of them; for thy speech maketh thee known. 74 Then began he to curse and to swear, I know not the man. And straightway the cock crew. 75 And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, Before the cock crew, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Peter was introduced into the courtyard because another disciple was known to the high priest (John 18:15f.). Which disciple do you think could really be an acquaintance of Jesus' archenemy and gain entrance for himself and Peter too without arousing suspicion?
- b. How could Peter be *inside* the palace of the high priest and yet be sitting *outside*, as Matthew affirms?
- c. On what principles may the supposed contradictions between the four Gospels' accounts of Peter's denials be resolved?
- d. Would you say that Peter was on trial as much as Jesus? What similarities between the two trials do you see? What differences?
- e. Do you think Peter really *had* to answer everyone's questions, when none of them were authorized to quiz him so? On what principle? Should he not simply have kept people at their distance, held his tongue or brushed past them as if he had not heard?

- f. (1) How did Peter's speech expose him as a disciple of Jesus?  
(2) How did his many denials actually expose him too?
- g. Why did Peter now go out and weep bitterly?
- h. How would Jesus' exhortation to "watch and pray that you enter not into temptation" have helped Peter avoid this debacle?
- i. Have you ever denied the Lord or your relationship to Him when people were trying to press you for a commitment? Did you ever do it by silence?
- j. Are there common things like the crow of a cock in our lives today that recall us to our duty?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Following Jesus at a safe distance, Simon Peter got as far as the courtyard of the high priest's residence, and so did another disciple. However, because this latter was known to the high priest, he went on into the courtyard along with Jesus, while Peter halted outside at the door. So the disciple known to the high priest stepped out and spoke to the maid on duty at the door, and brought Peter right into the courtyard too.

Now the servants and other subordinates had kindled a charcoal fire in the center of the courtyard, because it was cold. They were standing round it, warming themselves. Peter too was standing with them, keeping himself warm. They sat down around it, so Peter, to see how it would end for Jesus, crouched down among them, warming himself at the fire.

While Peter was sitting downstairs in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest—the maidservant who kept the door—came by and saw Peter warming himself as he sat turned toward the firelight. She came up close to him and, looking at him closely, declared, "You are not another of this man's disciples too, are you? You too were with that Jesus, the Galilean from Nazareth!"

But he denied it before them all, "I am not. Lady, I do not know Him. I neither know nor understand what you are talking about!" He arose and went out into the gateway, [and a cock crowed].

There another girl saw him and began telling the bystanders, "This fellow is one of them. He was with Jesus of Nazareth." A little later someone else saw him standing there warming himself and challenged him, "You are too one of his disciples!"

He continued to deny it a second time, adding an oath, "Man, I am not! I do not know the man!"

About an hour later the bystanders went up to Peter and insisted, "Unquestionably, you are too one of them, because you are a Galilean: your accent gives you away!" One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of Malchus whose ear Peter had sliced off, spoke up, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?"

Again Peter denied it, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" He began to call down curses on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man you are talking about."

He had no sooner said this when the rooster crowed a second time. The Lord turned and looked searchingly at Peter. Then Peter remembered the prediction the Lord had made to him, "Before the rooster crows twice today, you will disown me three times." He then went outside and broke down, weeping bitterly.

### SUMMARY

Peter and John followed the arresting party as far as the high priest's residence. John, because of his acquaintance with the high priest, gained admittance for himself and Peter too. Peter, however, because of his brogue, was recognized as a disciple of the Man now on trial, and so drew attention to himself. Various people tried to get him to admit his belonging to Jesus' following, but he steadfastly denied all connection. At last, Peter heard the cock that Jesus had predicted. A heart-searching gaze from Jesus brought Peter to his senses, sending him out, shaken and penitent, to weep the bitter tears of the guilty.

### NOTES

Many note discrepancies among the versions of this incident our Gospels furnish. However, Alford (I,282ff.) rightly argued that simple differences are not a threat to faith but positive support for it, in that these

furnish one of the clearest instances of the *entire independency of the four Gospels of one another* . . . (1) supposing the four accounts to be entirely independent of one another, we are not bound to require accordance, nor would there in all probability be any such accordance, in the recognitions of Peter by different persons. These may have been many on each occasion of denial, and independent narrators may have fixed on different ones

among them. (2) No reader . . . will require that the actual words spoken by Peter should in each case be identically reported . . . the substantiative fact of a denial remains the same whether *ouk oïda ti légeis*, *ouk oïda autòn*, or *ouk eimi* are reported to have been Peter's answer. (3) I do not see that we are obliged to limit the narrative to three sentences from Peter's mouth, each expressing a denial, and no more. On three occasions during the night he was recognized,—on three occasions he was a denier of his Lord: such a statement may well embrace reiterated expressions of recognition, and reiterated and importunate denials, on each occasion. . . . In narratives which have sprung from such truthful independent accounts, they [the readers] must be prepared sometimes (as e.g. in the details of the day of the Resurrection) for discrepancies which, at our distance, we cannot satisfactorily arrange: now and then we may, as in this instance, be able to do so with something like verisimilitude:—in some cases, not at all. But whether we can thus arrange them or not, being thoroughly persuaded of the holy truthfulness of the Evangelists, and of the divine guidance under which they wrote, our faith is in no way shaken by such discrepancies. We value them rather, as testimonies to independence: and are sure, that if for one moment we could be put in complete possession of all the details as they happened, each account would find its justification, and the reasons of all the variations would appear.

The accusations and Peter's negations are the sort of conversation that is real: not calm, neat and orderly, but ragged, repeated and bunched into successive rounds or groups of attacks and denials. Each probably said what our Gospels report, without the Evangelists' believing that any one said neither more nor less than the brief phrases cited. The Evangelist that quotes more includes the report of him who cites less, while he who quotes less does not deny the fuller report. Some are talking about Peter, while others accuse him directly. Sometimes he answers the one; sometimes the others, each group of denials being considered one total event.

### THE DOWNWARD, PROGRESSIVE ROAD OF SIN: PETER IN THE LIONS' DEN

For a believer who unquestionably loves the Lord, Peter's denials furnish us a New Testament case history of an unexcelled opportunity:

to stand up for Christ in an unsympathetic environment. But it is highly instructive, being also the narration of what can go wrong for anyone. His strangeness to that environment turned everyone's attention on him, thus giving him an audience. Could he not simply identify himself as one who sincerely loved Jesus, even though completely stunned that He had not fulfilled his expectations? Surely these palace servants could understand this and, at worst, scorn Peter's folly, imprison him for a few days or, at best, even commiserate him who frankly admitted this. Then what went wrong?

### THE BOLD IMPRUDENCE OF FERVENT LOVE

**26:58 But Peter followed him afar off, unto the court of the high priest, and entered in, and sat with the officers, to see the end.** The PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY summarizes the sequence of events. (Cf. parallel Gospel texts.) *The court of the high priest*, see on 26:57, 69. In *following afar off* Peter shows a mixture of love for Jesus and fearfulness of being implicated too. So far from an informed, holy boldness, this attitude reflects his unbelief in Jesus' doctrine of the cross and his perplexity at seeing Jesus defeated. *The officers* are the Temple police, not Roman soldiers who, no longer needed, would have returned to their quarters in the Castle Antonia. (See on 26:47.) When the other disciples forsook Jesus and fled, they kept going. Peter, at the risk of his personal safety, *followed*.

Why was Peter there? Earlier, Peter had shown the spirit of a fighter, capable of plotting a daring rescue. Meanwhile, however, he had been stunned to witness Jesus willingly led away as a lamb to the slaughter, strictly forbidding him to use the sword. All this notwithstanding, Peter was absolutely unwilling to desert Him. A less docile Judas could hope for divine intervention or some violent escape, but it is at least doubtful that Peter saw himself as a spy who must prudently retain his identity secret at all costs to reconnoiter and renew the struggle later. His stated purpose for being there was *to see the end*.

*To see the end* means that Peter's denials occurred contemporaneously with Jesus' hearings before Annas and Caiaphas. Sadly, while Jesus was courageously facing hate-filled accusations with masterful poise, Peter was shamefully cracking under hostile pressure. *To see the end* is not idle curiosity but ardent love for his dear friend Jesus and intense anxiety to learn the outcome of his trials. All the enemies' challenges were unable to drive him out or break down his bold front

and make him confess. At all costs he was determined to stay inside that palace and learn the trial's outcome.

### SATAN'S SIFTING OF SIMON

**26:69 Now Peter was sitting without in the court: and a maid came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilean.** The *court* in question is not the hearing chamber where Jesus was being tried, but an open courtyard. Thus, Peter was *sitting without in the court*, because the high priest's palace itself surrounded this central, open-air courtyard. So, he was both *within the palace but also outside*, i.e., not in one of its rooms. In reporting that "Peter was below in the courtyard," (Mark (14:66) suggests that the courtyard in the heart of the palace was on a lower level than the chamber where Jesus' hearings were taking place. Because it was early morning in Jerusalem's higher elevation in early spring, these rugged men felt the chill of the night air in the stone courtyard open to the sky and kindled a cheering fire while they waited the hearings' outcome. While John calls it a charcoal fire (John 18:18), during the process of burning more highly combustible material to ignite the charcoal, more light was given off by the fire. (Cf. Luke 22:56, *tò phôs*.) That John pictured Peter as standing while the Synoptics record his *sitting* only more graphically depicts Peter as moving gradually into place, first standing then sitting near the fire.

*Sitting* means more than near the warmth of the fire. For Peter's deliberately *sitting* among them implies the nonchalance of a man who, like them, is against the Nazarene and on the side of the high priest. *Sitting* also betrays his sense of false security. Unquestionably, concern for Jesus drew him here, but he was seriously blind to the high risk of being in this company so spiritually unprepared.

That a *maid* "who kept the door" (John 18:17) and other servants were on duty in the high priest's palace so late that night indicates the extraordinary events that were occurring. The girls would not only be involved in serving food but even keeping the door. (Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* VI,2,1; Acts 12:13.) The portress apparently did not ask Peter her embarrassing question immediately as he entered, but later when she too left the door area and approached the fire where she could see Peter's face more clearly in the firelight (Mark 14:66f.; Luke 22:56). That a person known to be a *disciple* (John 18:15) recommended Peter's entrance may have suggested Peter's connections

to her. Lenski (*Matthew*, 1070) suggests that she was moved by self-importance, wanting these men to realize "that she knew something they did not know. Here they were talking about Jesus and about what had just taken place and yet did not know that right in their own midst sat one of Jesus' own disciples."

*Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilean.* Because it was a known disciple who got Peter in, *Thou also* links Peter with discipleship. She insinuates a conclusion: "You are not one of this man's disciples too, are you?" (John 18:17). For Peter, this maid's inquisition is mitigated only in form, since her words expected a negative answer, a factor that facilitated his denial. However, she motivates her inquisitiveness by an incriminating, if yet unproven, observation: "You too were with Jesus." Even so, there is yet no criticism implied in her oblique allusion to John's discipleship. So, why should Peter be so anxious to deny his own? Hendriksen (*John*, 393) sees her as maliciously ironic, because in her heart she already knew the answer to her question. Whether malicious or not, beneath her words lurked a terrible threat to Peter's security and he must answer.

## 1. VAGUE NEGATION

26:70 **But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest**, stammering, "I am not. Lady, I do not know Him. I neither know nor understand what you are talking about" (Mark 14:68; Luke 22:57; John 18:17)! Her unexpected disclosure, made in the presence of people (*émprosthen pànton*) among whom Peter considered himself relatively safe, caught him by surprise. In his panic his first impulse is self-preservation. He timidly denied even knowing Jesus, much less a follower. After faking complete ignorance and neutrality on the question, he eased away from the fire and walked to the forecourt or gateway, as if he had other business that required his presence elsewhere (Mark 14:68).

Mark reports the crow of a cock here (Mark 14:68). Although there are some manuscripts that do not contain this nor its later reference (Mark 14:72, see *A Textual Commentary*, 115f.), however, if it really crowed at this point, it would seem that Peter did not hear it, else he would have been conscience-struck sooner. Mark is not merely indicating the time, but the fulfillment of Jesus' word as he reported it (Mark 14:30). See note on 26:74.

26:71 And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and saith unto them that were there, This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth. About an hour before the third denial (Luke 22:59), or about two o'clock, Peter went out into *the porch* (*tòn pulôna*; cf. *tò proaùllion*, Mark 14:68), the gateway or arched passageway leading from the central courtyard to the street. Peter has no time to shake the fear brought on by the first challenge. *Another maid*: Matthew and Mark describe the second accuser as a girl, whereas Luke unquestionably mentions a different man (Luke 22:58; *héteros* . . . *ánthrope*). This apparent discrepancy may be resolved by seeing the crowd at Caiaphas' palace as large. There are now at least two girls, the original portress (Mark has the article: *he paidiske*, "the girl mentioned before," Mark 14:66) and one other (Matthew: *alle*). It is not clear whether the second denials occurred at the porch leading to the gate or at the fire. Perhaps the pressure began at the porch when the doormaid initiated this second attack by exposing Peter to another girl and a man standing around in the entranceway (Mark 14:69). Peter, to avoid it, retreated back to the fire only to find himself the center of attention at the fire where the others took up the chase (John 18:25). Thus, his return to the fire was not the dogged courage of love but the risky solution of the desperate.

*This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth.* Peter could not ignore the girl's approach, because her accusations continued to splatter around among men. It is noteworthy that neither Matthew nor Mark affirm that Peter answered the *maid* directly, but merely report that "he denied" to the bystanders, and only Luke quotes Peter as addressing the man, without denying that the maid had instigated this second exposure. While several people accuse him, this second denial is made all at the same general time as the result of this psychological build-up of pressure from various points. Would not hasty departure in this uneasy situation now confirm their suspicions? Again, he must answer.

## 2. CLEAR DENIAL SUPPORTED BY A FALSE OATH

26:72 And again he denied with an oath, I know not the man. (Note Mark's imperfect tense: *erneïto*; Luke 22:58; John 18:25.) "He kept denying," evidence of a number of phrases not recorded. The tragedy when he lied (cf. 16:16; John 6:68f.) was worsened when he backed it up with an oath. This is perjury. Deeply shaken, Peter unnecessarily exaggerates, because many of Jesus' enemies knew Him

all too well, yet were not His disciples. How could anyone, so obviously Galilean as this Peter, live in Galilee, without at least *knowing the man*?! The man protests overmuch, if he is really indifferent to the Nazarene or about his own reputation. Further, what was Peter doing *among the high priest's servants*, if he could not admit to them his reason for being there? His very denials give him away.

**26:73 And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter, Of a truth thou also art one of them; for thy speech maketh thee known.** Luke (22:59) notes the passage of time as "about an hour later," a fact that gives more reality to this scene:

1. It indicates how long it was taking the authorities to find an adequate basis upon which to establish a basis for the death sentence for Jesus. (See John 18:19ff.; 26:59ff.)
2. It lulled Peter into a false security that feared no more inquisitions.
3. It gave bystanders time to mull over Peter's strange nervousness and his regional dialect and uncover further proof of his falseness.

Just when Peter thought his ordeal over, some men who had been discussing Peter, confront him directly, *Of a truth thou art one of them*. Peter's lying had not accomplished anything. Rather, now firmer than ever, this conviction of his true loyalties had a two-fold basis:

1. His dialectical pronunciation was typically Galilean, as opposed to the linguistic refinement of the cultured in the capital: "*Your accent gives you away!*" (Mark 14:70; Luke 22:59). Alford, (I, 285, citing Westein) noted that the Galileans could not pronounce the guttural sounds properly and made other changes in Hebrew words.
2. His face was virtually recognized by a relative of Malchus, the man whose ear Peter had sliced off: "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" (John 18:26). Not just embarrassing, this almost positive recognition is really dangerous.

### 3. LYING UNDER OATH AND SELF-CURSING

**26:74 Then began he to curse and to swear, I know not the man. And straightway the cock crew.** Unable to escape the damning evidence of his own dialect—the more he said, the more he proved their point—, and pressured by this dangerous witness to his sword-swinging in the garden, Peter felt he must now employ the most serious device conceivable to convince these unfriendly, suspicious hearers. In his

frustration and desperation, he began vehemently *to curse and to swear*. Simon Peter was no profane man. His sense of the sacred must not be sullied by misconception on our part. *He began to curse*, i.e. to call God's wrath down upon himself, if what he was saying were untrue; *and to swear*, i.e. invoke God as witness of the truthfulness of his affirmations. His sin lay not in the act of cursing or swearing, because as proven before (see notes on 26:63), neither is sin and both may be absolutely right and necessary. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 936) rightly contrasts Christ's oath (26:63F.) and Peter's (26:72, 74): "the former confirms the truth; the latter sanctions the lie!" So, his loss of the sacred, his sin, consisted in *invoking God's approval upon what he knew was not true*.

*I know not the man*. Paradoxically, this is his first true statement. Had Peter truly *known* Jesus, he would not have worried about Jesus' final destiny, because he would have believed His every prediction of victory as the unshakable word of God. Instead, in his frantic self-defense he has almost completely forgotten the Lord whose honor he would defend.

*And straightway the cock crew* about three o'clock Friday morning. Jesus' hearings continued through the night from his arrest apparently until this moment (Luke 22:61).

### WHOSE CHICKEN WAS THIS?

If it be objected that the Jews did not keep roosters in the city, let it be answered that this particular rooster belonged to foreigners over whom the Jewish rules could not claim obedience. Nor would Sadducees feel bound by unwritten traditions that, without Mosaic sanction, forbid such fowls in the City. Were not Annas and Caiaphas chiefest among the Sadducees (Acts 5:17)?

Further, the two cock-crowings cannot be explained as the sound of the Roman buccina sounding the changing of the guard, because, whereas the 3 a.m. blast of the trumpet might be called *gallicinium* or "cock-crow," would the *midnight* trumpet also be termed thus? The two cock-crowings mentioned by Mark are only an hour or so apart (cf. Mark 14:48, 72 with Luke 22:58-60), hence not the sounding of the *gallicinium* which only occurred every three hours, i.e. at midnight and at 3 a.m. Peter heard a real rooster.

## The Lord's power over Peter

**26:75 And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.** (See notes on 26:34.) That cock crowing meant nothing to anyone but Peter. His mind's eye vividly saw the earlier scene with his forgotten, rash promises and Jesus' sad, strenuously discarded predictions. Did he also remember Jesus' other word: "He who denies me before men, him will I deny before my Father who is in heaven" (10:33)? He broke down not only because of the cock-crowing, but, just as significantly, because, at that moment, "the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter" (Luke 22:61). Many see this moment as a transfer of Jesus from one chamber in the high priest's palace to another where He would be held until the morning session. Therefore, while Peter's attention was diverted by this new movement, Jesus could pause, turn and look meaningfully and understandably straight into his heart. Tolbert (*Good News From Matthew*, 231): "This is the moment when grace can begin its work—when a man is stripped of his arrogance and stands before God naked in his need."

*Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said.* Memory, that gift of God, pierced his self-deception, mistaken shame and terror, convincing and condemning him. It reminded him of Jesus' love and broke his heart, leaving him ashamed, self-condemned and agonizing over his dishonoring the lord he loved. Here is the point of the Scriptures and the Lord's Supper: to save us by vivid God-given reminders that can pierce our soul and bring us to repentance. (Cf. II Peter 1:12-15, 3:1.)

*And he went out, and wept bitterly.* While the others moved to their duties in the changed situation and Sanhedrinists went home for the night, Peter, blinded by tears, could stumble out the front gate together with them, hardly noticed. *He went out, and wept bitterly*, because he could no longer face himself. Unworthy even to be near Jesus, the perjured disciple has no further justification for being there. Where all the hostility of others could not tear him from his determination, one unspoken word, the eloquent, anguished look from the injured Master, broke him down completely. He is ashamed, because it has now dawned on him that he has just done that of which he believed himself completely incapable. He, Jesus' privileged apostle and dear friend, had really done this to Him! (Cf. Ps. 55:12ff.)

So why did Peter deny his relation to Jesus? Peter's failure is not merely the product of a unique combination of elements in his character and temperament which exposed him to be tempted in precisely this way, as if these temptations were meaningful only to Peter or those of a personality like his. Rather, are not these elements characteristic of all of us at one time or another?

1. Physically exhausted and shivering in the early-morning chill, Peter's thoughts ran to creature comforts (cf. Mark 14:54; John 18:18), rather than to the nearness of temptation and the spiritual battle to be fought. (Cf. 26:41.) His resistance and presence of mind to meet challenges were worn down by the emotional drain of excitement and sorrow of the preceding day. So far from spiritual preparedness, he was hardly ready physically for this battle.
2. Unjustified self-confidence: he presumptuously ignored warnings of this peril. A synonym of self-trust is faithlessness. He did not believe Christ's predictions either of his own failure or of Christ's victory without his own ill-conceived help. This amounts to rejection to Christ's revelations whereinsofar they clashed with Peter's views. Further, to arm himself against all trials he trusted his own emotional enthusiasm for Jesus, rather than an intelligent determination to do God's revealed will at all costs.
3. Rashness: he was deliberately sitting among Jesus' enemies, self-exposed to the very temptation against which he had been warned. He certainly was not thinking of denying Christ, yet like us in an unguarded moment, he was *simply not thinking*, but plunged into ill-considered activity.
4. The temptation's unexpectedness: he was distracted because his gaze was directed toward the trials and Jesus. He was neither watching nor praying to avoid temptation when he was suddenly confronted with the challenge.
5. Initial timidity that feared men rather than a holy boldness based on the fear of the Lord and a firm, correct knowledge of God's will. He feared reprisals and cost to himself. His confidence, that when God decides a thing victory is guaranteed, was severely shattered when he saw Christ arrested like a common criminal without defending Himself. His earlier boldness was now replaced by a wary, instinctive self-protectiveness which tempts a person to resort to *any means*, even falsehood as a way of avoiding trouble.
6. His sense of purpose and direction is damaged, for what could he actually do for Jesus here that would not be judged out of order

by the Lord Himself? He wrongly assumed that serious temptations could be courageously met with swords, ingoring the subtler, more deadly trials of a servant-girl's question.

7. Evil companions may also be a factor. Granted, they were unsympathetic to Christ's cause, and their pressuring hurried him to sin. But the least they could have done was laugh at him in their unbelief or arrest him for a day or so; the most, let him keep his promise to die for Jesus. But they were the least significant element, because, looked at from the Lord's point of view, these servants were only trying to get Peter to say what he really and deeply believed.

What Peter did after this moral break-down, the Gospel writers omit. Their last words leave him a humbled, brokenhearted man who must struggle with his lostness, overwhelmed with shame and grief, until thrilled by the stirring news of the resurrection morning, "The Lord is risen!"

What is our lesson? Without the grace of Christ, how strong is the bravest man? Peter's humiliated self-confidence challenges the best of disciples among us: who would dare trust himself to believe that he *could not* do the most abominable deed (I Cor. 10:11-13)? Further, the gravest threat may not always come from a Christian's weak points, but from what he considers his strength. This Satan succeeds in twisting against the Christian himself. On the other hand, how great is the spiritual power of God's grace and forgiveness in believers! Consider Peter's restoration to become the great pillar of the Church. Peter's grief had led to life through repentance, because he listened to the appeals of his own smitten conscience (II Cor. 7:10). Judas' fall, on the other hand, was a deliberate choice matured in harmony with his mentality. Peter's was the accidental fall of a good man, a real disciple, truly touched by his sense of sin and of the Lord's rightness. This explains his rapid rehabilitation as opposed to Judas' suicide.

That Jesus could so accurately foresee the various forces that would produce Peter's breakdown and even the timing proves even more remarkably His divine knowledge. That He foresaw it *and let it happen anyway*, points to the deep respect God has for the human will. He let this sincere but rash believer go wrong to reveal his weakness to him, break his overconfidence and teach him dependence on Himself. But He never ceased to intercede for Peter. The same Jesus who forewarned Peter and interceded before God for him, whose look restored Peter's sense of guilt, later freely forgave and re-established him,

offers us mercy and pleads our case before God, however deep our sin (John 6:37; Rev. 22:17; Heb. 7:25). Should not this exalted concept of His graciousness stir our hearts to grateful worship?

We easily identify with the sins of the great Bible characters, such as David and Peter, *but can we repent with them?* With loyal hearts and deep devotion do we abhor sin and weep over it before God like they? Oh God, when I have debased your Name, played the fool and denied my discipleship, send me a Nathan, a rooster, anything, to call my wandering heart back to you! May I hear all the voices in Creation and in your Word that call me to repentance (Ps. 19: Rom. 1:20)!

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What elements led to Peter's denials?
2. Explain how Peter gained entrance to the courtyard of the high priest.
3. Mark states that Peter was "beneath in the palace," whereas Matthew affirms "without in the palace." Harmonize these expressions.
4. What was Peter's motive(s) for being there?
5. Why did Peter join the men seated there at the fire lit in the high priest's courtyard? What time of year was it? Would it have been cold enough for a fire?
6. Who first accused Peter?
7. Who accused him the second time?
8. How much time elapsed during Jesus' trials and, consequently, Peter's? About what time of night did the third denial occur?
9. What clues demolished Peter's anonymity in the eyes of the bystanders?
10. What method(s) did Peter use to defend his assertions?
11. Explain the proposition: "Peter was not a profane man, just lying." In what sense did he curse and swear?
12. How many cocks crowed that night? Prove your answer.
13. What did Peter remember when he heard the cock crow?
14. What elements do the Gospels furnish that permit us to discern time connections between the denials of Peter and the trials of Christ?

## SECTION 71

### JESUS IS CONDEMNED BY THE FULL SANHEDRIN

(Parallels: Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66—23:1; John 18:28)

TEXT: 27:1, 2

1 Now when morning was come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: 2 and they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him up to Pilate the governor.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think that the early morning hour of this consultation held by the authorities of Israel exposes their intentions as evil? Why?
- b. What relationship is there between this consultation and the others held during the night? If those were definitive, why bother to hold another now?
- c. Is there any evidence that the *entire* decision-making body of Israel was not assembled in plenary session to deal with Jesus? If so, give the proof.
- d. How does this hearing resemble the earlier, night sessions as to strategy? How does it differ? What is repeated? What is omitted?
- e. Why do you think the Jews did not kill Jesus outright themselves? After all, they stoned Stephen. Why take Him to Pilate now?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Very early, that is, as soon as morning came, the national council of the elders was immediately convened so, all the chief priests and theologians led Jesus away from there to their council chamber. This entire Sanhedrin held a consultation to decide the best procedure for getting Jesus executed.

“If you are the Christ,” they demanded, “tell us so!”

But His reply was, “If I tell you, you will not believe me. If I ask you a question, you will not answer. But from now on I, the Son of man, will be seated at the right hand of Almighty God!”

Then they all asked, “Are you God’s Son, then?”

He said to them, “You said it. I am!”

“What further testimony do we need?” they asked. “We have heard it ourselves from his own mouth!”

At this, the whole assembly rose, tied Jesus' hands and led Him from Caiaphas to the Praetorium and turned Him over to Pilate the governor. It was still early.

### SUMMARY

To ratify the results of the night hearings, a brief show-trial is held before a hastily convened full Sanhedrin. Only the principle issue guaranteed to produce a unanimous verdict of guilty was raised: Jesus' allegedly false claim to be God's Son, hence, to be deity despite His obvious humanity. The tactic succeeded in its intent and a relatively united senate sentenced Him to death. To accomplish this, they must work through the Roman governor, to whom they now go.

### NOTES

27:1 **Now when morning was come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.** It was Friday *morning*, Nisan 15. The Synoptics picture the plotters as astir at daybreak as soon as possible (*Proiās genoménes*; Mark 15:1:  *euthùs proi*; Luke 23:1:  *hos egéneto heméra*). Even after a hurried-up morning session, their arrival at Pilate's headquarters could still be described as "early" (John 18:28: *proi*). Contrary to the opinion of some, their haste is not dictated by the supposed need to complete everything before the afternoon slaying of the Paschal lambs which had actually taken place the day before. (Cf. on 26:17.) Rather, it was to dispose of Jesus speedily before His supporters could get wind of it and block everything by a riot (26:5).

*And the chief priests and the elders of the people.* (For terminology see notes on 26:59.) Mark's expression (*kai hòlon tò sunédrión*) is simply explanatory, "even the entire Sanhedrin." Perhaps because Matthew had already named the entire Sanhedrin, he left it to the discernment of the reader to deduce that the same authorities who began the trials would certainly conclude them (26:59, 65f. = Mark 14:55, 63f.). However, the full Sanhedrin is explicitly named (Mark 15:1  *hòlon tò sunédrión*: Luke 22:66  *eis tò sunédrión autòn*). Mark's expression confirms the impression that this is no mere sectional interest or party tribunal but a plenary session of the national Sanhedrin itself. Luke's explicit "the assembly of the elders of the people . . . led him away to their council" (Luke 22:66) excludes the supposition

that there is a contradiction between John and the Synoptics as to the location or participants of the morning trial. (See below on 27:2.)

The brevity of this *pro forma* session must not lead to discount the importance of what did or did not occur there. Here again all respect for legal conventions was subordinated to what these leaders judged a higher consideration: the speedy removal of the Nazarene. If judgments of Jewish capital crimes must be unanimous, who heard the objections of Joseph of Arimathea and probably of Nicodemus (Luke 23:50f.)? Further, the arguments that (1) the unanimity must be obtained by a quorum of 23, not necessarily all 71 members, and that (2) they could have hand-picked the jury without informing some of the meeting, are obviated by Mark who unequivocally declares that the priests, elders and scribes present constituted "the whole Sanhedrin" (Mark 15:1; cf. Luke 2:66: *tò presbutérion toû laou*; Acts 22:5). The absence of a few notable councillors does not alter the criminal responsibility of the resounding majority vote against Jesus. This determination of Jesus' death by the supreme council of Israel harmonizes precisely with His many predictions (16:21f.; 20:17ff.).

That the perfunctory questioning of Jesus at the morning consultation was in some details similar to that of the night meetings, is to be expected. Those former hearings were preliminary. This is the formal trial to keep up the appearance of justice (two hearings in serious criminal cases; day-time sentence, etc.). Thus, because the night sessions would not be considered final, even though the previous testimony of Jesus counted against Him, the main issue of His claims would be repeated for confirmation in the daytime session.

*Took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.* For a skeleton transcript of the central issue, see Luke 22:67-71. Because His fate is already determined, this brief, formal session is held to plot the most effective means of executing their sentence. No mention is made of witnesses or testimony, because the fiasco of the previous night must not be repeated (26:59-61). Because only Jesus' self-incrimination as divine Messiah could swing the jury against Him, this is the exclusive tactic followed by the morning questioning. And yet, because blasphemy would not be a criminal offense in Roman jurisprudence, all their night-time activities would accomplish nothing until Pilate approved their judgment. Therefore, the most persuasive way of stating the case must be found that would convince Pilate to cooperate in confirming their verdict to execute Jesus. They faced the live possibility that Pilate would not simply ratify their verdict, and demand to try Jesus' case himself. From the results of their deliberations, it appears

that they were unable to establish a clear case (John 18:29f.), hoping that turning Him over as an evil-doer to Pilate would have been sufficient bluff to convince Pilate to rubber-stamp their verdict without opening the case. If pressed, they would emphasize the political impact of Jesus' religious pretenses. So, to make Jesus out to be a threat to the Roman political machine, the trumped up charges decided upon are (1) perverting the nation; (2) forbidding to give tribute to Caesar; and (3) claim to be an anointed king (Luke 23:2, 5; John 18:14, 19:12).

**27:2 and they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him to Pilate the governor.**

When the Jews rejected as king over all Palestine the wicked Archelaus, latest scion of Herod the Great, they sought direct Roman intervention (*Ant.* XVIII, 13,1-3; *Wars*, II,6,1; 7,3; 8,1). Procurators were appointed as civil and military *governor* of Judea and Samaria with their usual residence located at Caesarea, the Roman administrative capital of Palestine. (Cf. Acts 23:23, 33; 25:1, 4, 6, 13.) This latest, Pontius *Pilate*, ruled from 26-36 A.D. (For further study on *Pilate*, see Josephus *Ant.* XVIII,3,1-2; 4,1-2; 6,5; *Wars* II,9,2-4; Tacitus, *Annals* XV,44; Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* I,9,10; II,2,5,7 Philo, *De Legationem ad Caium*, c. 38.) However, because of the extremely highly volatile concentration of people of Jewish feasts when nationalistic sentiment ran high, Roman troops accompanying the governor rolled into Jerusalem to preside personally over the maintenance of order. Although Jesus had been sentenced to death, Israel's authorities did not at this time possess the right to execute the death penalty (John 18:31; cf. *Ant.* XX,9,1; *Wars* II,8,1). So, the decision of the Sanhedrin to hand Jesus over to Pilate was, politically, a foregone conclusion. To avoid having to stone Jesus publicly and risk civil war with His massive popular following, the remaining obstacle to carrying out their plan consisted in convincing Pilate.

When *they delivered him to Pilate*, as John has it, "they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium," i.e. from where Caiaphas' authority as God's high priest was supreme (*apò toû Kaià*) to the Praetorium (*eis tò praitòion*), the Roman jurisdiction of Pilate (John 18:28). Unless the high priest's palace were the temporary meeting place of the Sanhedrin, they did not depart from Caiaphas' *palace* (as many read John's wording), because they already left his palace that morning to take Jesus into their council for the final trial (Luke 22:66: *sunéchthē tò presbutériub toû laou . . . kai apégagon autòn eis tò sunédriion autòn*).

However, it is also possible that the Sanhedrin met in Caiaphas' Palace and walked from it to the Praetorium. There are cryptic Jewish reports that the Sanhedrin did not meet in its rightful meeting place for forty years before the fall of Jerusalem. (Cf. *Y. Sanhedrin*, 1,18a,34; 7:24b,41; *Abodah Zarah*, 8b, cited by Barrett, *John*, 445.) Was this due to the curbing of the Sanhedrin's power by Rome, or by Herod earlier, or both? In that political environment possibly a large room in the palace of Caiaphas was utilized more or less regularly in this capacity. In this case, Luke's language (22:66) means that Jesus was led away from His overnight prison to this *ad interim* meeting place of the full Sanhedrin in the high priest's palace. Either way, however, John does not confuse trials, locations or contradict the Synoptics, as he has been charged.

So, this confirmatory session occurred in the relatively normal chamber for such decisions, the meeting place of the Sanhedrin. In a body (Luke 23:1) they walked from the council to the Praetorium. Even this impressive display of moral force may be intended as part of a bluff to impress Pilate with the gravity of trying the rabble-rouser they bring before him.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. At what time of day did this consultation occur?
2. Who attended it? Specify who constituted this council.
3. Where was this session held? Prove your answer.
4. Explain why the chief priests and elders would need another session, if they had already sentenced Jesus to death the night before.
5. Why would questions that were already answered the night before be repeated at this session?
6. What specifically was the council deciding about Jesus? On what charge(s) was He arraigned before them?
7. Was their decision unanimous concerning Jesus? (Cf. Luke 23:50f.; John 19:38)
8. What action did they take immediately?
9. Who was Pontius Pilate? Why did the Jews deliver Jesus to him when they themselves had pronounced His death sentence?

## SECTION 72

## JESUS' BETRAYER COMMITS SUICIDE

TEXT: 27:3-10

3 Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4 saying, I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood. But they said, What is that to us? see thou *to it*. 5 And he cast down the pieces of silver into the sanctuary, and departed; and he sent away and hanged himself. 6 And the chief priests took the pieces of silver, and said, it is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is the price of blood. 7 And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. 8 Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. 9 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was priced, whom *certain* of the children of Israel did price; 10 and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think Judas expected Jesus to be condemned to death?
- b. How would you differentiate between the repentance of Peter and that of Judas? Of what value to the modern Christian is a detailed study of Judas Iscariot?
- c. Do you see any value in the testimony Judas gave to Jesus' innocence? If so, what value is there? If not, why not?
- d. Do you think that in testifying to Jesus' innocence, Judas shows any love for Him?
- e. What was it that so completely crushed Judas and drove him to suicide?
- f. What does the priests' scruple about the proper use of the blood money indicate about them?
- g. When the priests' called it "blood money," do you think they unconsciously admitted Jesus' innocence? If not, what would this expression mean to them?
- h. Why do you think they selected a potter's field? Did God direct their choice or was this simply the only land available or what?
- i. Why do you think Matthew attributed the prophecy quoted to

Jeremiah instead of to Zechariah whose words more nearly resemble it? Did Matthew forget who wrote the prophecy?

j. Why do you think Matthew recorded the death of Judas?

### PARAPHRASE

When Judas, Jesus' betrayer, realized that He was really condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver money to the chief priests and elders. "I have sinned in betraying an innocent man to his death," he said.

"What has that got to do with us?" they retorted. "That is your problem!"

He then hurled the money into the sanctuary and left. Then he went off and hanged himself.

The chief priests, however, picked up the coins, arguing, "It is not legal to put this money into the temple fund, because it is tainted with blood." So, after discussing the matter, they used this sum to purchase the "Potter's Field," as a cemetery for foreigners. This is why that field has been called "The Field of Blood" ever since. In this way the words of the prophet Jeremiah came true:

They took the thirty pieces of silver, the amount some Israelites had established to pay for him, and they gave them for the Potter's Field, as the Lord had ordered me.

### SUMMARY

Incredibly for Judas, Jesus was condemned. Shocked, the betrayer attempted to make amends but was rudely rebuffed by heartless hypocrites. After hurling the money into the Temple's Holy Place, Judas committed suicide. On a scruple, the priests did not put the money into the treasury but purchased a piece of land as a burial ground for foreigners. Unintentionally on the part of the Jewish authorities, they hereby enacted the ancient prophecy.

### NOTES

#### A SHATTERED LIFE: FUTILE REPENTANCE AND RESTITUTION

27:3 Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself. Then (*tôte*) synchronizes Judas' awakening

with Jesus' consignment to Pilate immediately following the condemnation by the Sanhedrin (27:2). For the first time he grasped the horrible result of his betrayal: they were dragging the Lord off to His death! It is unclear just where or how Judas learned of the sentence. Unlike Peter, however, Judas would have had no public motive to distrust Jesus' foes. So, he could have witnessed the entire morning trial, hence did not need to wait until after Pilate's condemnation to hurry to the Temple to plead with the returning priests alone. Instead, Judas returned the money to the *chief priests and elders*, i.e., to the Sanhedrin, since Matthew's expression contextually refers to that body (26:3, 47, 57; cf. 26:59; 27:1 = Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66). Therefore, he stood before members of the supreme council, because, if Judas considered the Jewish sentence definitive, it being only a matter of time until Pilate carried it out, it is conceivable that, to halt this avalanche, he interrupted them even as they were preparing to go to Pilate.

Edersheim (*Life*, II,573) notes that during the trials before Pilate a definite break occurred when Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, after which the governor had to reconvene Jesus' accusers (27:17; Mark 15:8; Luke 23:13). So, it is alternatively possible that Judas' intervened with the individual *chief priests and elders* on Jesus' behalf during this recess.

*Judas . . . repented himself (metameletheis)*. He felt profound regret (21:30; II Cor. 7:8; Heb. 7:21). He was driven by circumstances to renounce the view that, we believe, stood at the base of his plot to betray Him, i.e. that Jesus *must* defend Himself. The unexpected consequences of his crime throw him into deep remorse, but do not save him. True repentance takes the sinner to the Lord, *not away* from Him to an improvised gallows. He found his fearful responsibility unbearable. (Cf. Cain's reaction, Gen. 4:13f.)

However, some say this verse is not proof that he had not planned for Jesus to suffer, because a person can regret the consequences of his act, even if he clearly foresaw them. Accordingly, Judas could have intended Jesus' death, but now regrets it. While study of his motives is a matter of considerable conjecture on our part, nevertheless, his confession (v. 4) need not militate against the view that the condemnation took him by surprise. In fact, what one plans for what he conceives of as good may smash back with terrific force, convincingly revealing itself as evil. To betray an innocent man to

*death* was not necessarily his purpose, but simply to betray an innocent man *to get Him to act on His own behalf to escape death*, although high-risk planning, is also compatible with Judas' shock.

*Judas . . . brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.* Because his deed burdened him with intolerable guilt, he wanted desperately to reverse his disastrous bargain. Naturally, he would return the money, but he could not hope to redeem Jesus from his enemies with this miserable sum, but by courageous, public testimony to Jesus' innocence. Did he hope that, if he offered new testimony after sentencing, they must hear Jesus' case again? Even if they took him for a necessary but despised tool in their plans and an unwelcome intrusion, they must hear him out.

### The betrayer's testimony

27:4 **saying, I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood. But they said, What is that to us? See thou to it. I have sinned** is the shocked reaction of a man unnerved at seeing the totally unexpected enormity of his blunder. Whatever the glamor of his former ambition, the enticement of what he imagined has now vanished. Only grim reality holds him in its grip, leaving him broken by remorse. His is the anguish of a man who would turn back the clock to rid his soul of this haunting hour. (Cf. Esau's grief, Heb. 12:16f.) Admirably, Judas took personal responsibility for his actions. He blames no one but himself. Yet this is not the repentance of a man who would fling himself at the foot of the cross to beg forgiveness of his Victim. Turning to Him is just not Judas' way.

Is it true that in testifying to Jesus' innocence, Judas shows no love for Him? His had always been that kind of self-interested friendship that manipulated his true Friend. Unquestionably, his shock is deep and genuine. Was he revolted only by the *consequences* of his act and not also at the heinous sinfulness of it? Yet, stark awareness of the abominableness of our sins, alone, does not break our hearts and lead us, repentant, to Jesus. Only undiminished confidence in God's gracious forgiveness can convince us to do that. Despite his long discipleship under Jesus, Judas did not believe this.

*I betrayed innocent blood* is the soul-cry of a tormented conscience seeking elementary justice for Another. However, *innocent blood*, as a Mosaic legal term (Exod. 23:7; cf. Deut. 27:25), would not have halted those heartless judges or procured a stay of execution for

Jesus. They refused to reopen the case, because Jesus was sentenced for blasphemy and Judas' defense did not refute the accusations on which it was founded. However, Judas' anguished pleas disprove the later Talmudical claim that for 40 days a herald went through Israel inviting anyone to come forward to defend the Nazarene, but none came. (Cf. Bab. Talmud, *Seder Nezikin*.)

Sadly, these anguished cries do not mitigate Judas' guilt, because, however innocent of all wrong-doing he considered Jesus, he never personally surrendered to the practical ramifications of Jesus' self-understanding, never bowed to His Lordship, never accepted the doctrine of the cross. (See notes on 26:14, 25, 49f.) Rather than confess his sin to these calloused priests, had he thrown himself upon the mercy of Jesus, he could have been forgiven. For pardon this frenzied soul turned to the wrong people.

*But they said, What is that to us?* They treat his belated testimony as immaterial, because they condemned Jesus for a claim they themselves heard and rejected as false, whereas Judas' generic defense seems to concern only Jesus' general good character against which they had no specific complaint. *See thou to it* translates two words, *sū òpsei* (future indicative of *horðo*), capable of two meanings:

1. If they intended a simple future tense, then they say: "What is your testimony of Jesus' innocence to us? He is guilty and you yourself (*sū*) shall see it."
2. Because in the Hebrew a future indicative can communicate an imperative sense, many render it as the ASV: *See thou to it*, "You will take care of the problem yourself!" (Cf. Acts 18:15, *òpsesthe autoi*.)

They had achieved the only goal that mattered. Rather than point this pitiful man they had used back to God as his hope from despair, they heartlessly tossed aside their despised, now useless tool.

### The appalling power of unresolved guilt

**27:5 And he cast down the pieces of silver into the sanctuary, and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.** So, if Jesus were taken from Caiaphas' palace (see on 27:2) somewhere on the *south* side of the Temple, to Pilate's quarters in the Antonia castle on the *north* side, Judas, failing to stop them, took a short-cut through the Temple and disposed of the money, while the others took Jesus to Pilate.

Shattered, the friendless traitor entered the Temple. The "reward of his iniquity" burned his hands and his agonized soul. Attempting to obtain relief, he entered the Temple and in an insane gesture of spite against the priests who rejected his attempt to save Jesus, hurled away this concrete reminder of his guilt. Two views of his act are possible:

1. He simply cast the money down at the priests' feet in any part of the Temple. (Some manuscripts have *en tō naō*.) Plummer (*Matthew*, 385) affirms that Josephus uses *naōs* "of the collective Temple-buildings," so our author could have too. However, Matthew does not affirm that Judas did this in the presence of priests. Yet, if he senselessly hurled it into the "treasury," his vindictiveness at being repulsed by the authorities is clearer: if they would not listen to his claim to justice for Jesus, now they must take back the money, wanted or not.
2. Judas could have hurled (*hripsas*) the coins with violent force through the open doors of *the sanctuary* into the Holy Place. (Better manuscripts have *eis tōn naōn*.) The arrangement of the Temple which makes this act possible demands that he stand in the Court of the Women at the Nicanor Gate at the top of the fifteen steps leading to the Court of the Priests. (Cf. *Wars*, V,5,4.)

*He . . . departed (anechōresen)* but apparently did not seek the understanding fellowship of other disciples. In the solitude of his self-counsel, did he believe them incompetent to help him?

*He went away and hanged himself.* No man commits suicide casually. There is a strange consistency in Judas' final act. Because his root-motivation seems to have been selfish ambition that clamored for instant solutions, he would not hesitate to eliminate anyone or anything that hindered his happiness.

Was Judas' final act of self-oblivion the attempt to escape the curse for betraying the innocent for a bribe (Deut. 27:25)? Or did he even think of this? Did he remember Jesus' fearful prophecy 26:24)? Was it not the frenzied desperation of a man so tortured by his own conscience that he would rather become his own executioner than tolerate its accusations? Even so, did he not curse himself by hanging himself (Deut. 21:22f.)? The sad irony is that salvation for Judas was as close as Jesus, had he but believed it—and Him!

Judas, according to Matthew, hanged himself. Luke says, however, "he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled

out" (Acts 1:18). The alleged contradiction is resolved by noting that, whereas Luke describes the result of Judas' suicide, our author documents the way he died, i.e. by hanging. Whether Judas' decaying body remained suspended several days and either the limb or rope would not support his weight, or whether these broke when he fell headlong and his body was grotesquely impaled on a sharp rock from which he could not extricate himself, the conditions are supplied to harmonize both testimonies. Thus, the Acts account incidentally supplements Matthew's.

**LAUNDERING CRIMINAL MONEY:  
CALLOUSNESS ABOUT JUSTICE BUT  
SANCTIMONIOUS SCRUPULOUSNESS ABOUT TRIVIA**

**27:6 And the chief priests took the pieces of silver, and said, it is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is the price of blood.** Judas' unanticipated move left these legalists a dilemma. Possibly founded on Deuteronomy 23:18, their argument may have concluded that nothing abominable to God be considered acceptable as a proper offering (*eis tôn korbanân*: "given to God"; cf. Mark 7:11). *The treasury*, cf. Mark 12:41; Luke 21:1; John 8:20; Josephus, *Wars*, II,9,4.

Is calling this money *the price of blood* the unwitting admission that they purchased the death of an objectively *innocent* man? From their point of view, no, because these sophists could call it *the price of blood* merely from its connection with a person's death which they completely justify. Their scruple is morally frivolous, because they had been ready to withdraw it perhaps from the holy treasury itself to secure the death of Jesus, but were unwilling to accept it back when it has been used for its intended purpose!

**27:7 And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in.** This purchase may have occurred after the crucifixion, in which case, Matthew recorded it ahead of time, to avoid breaking into the story following. Because the land in question is described as *the potter's field*, some deduce that its value was too clayey for agriculture, hence suitable only for stripping its clay for pottery. Because the priests buy it for a cemetery, its clay may already have been depleted, leaving only an abandoned excavation good for nothing. Hence *the potter* would sell the worn-out land for such a low sum.

*To bury strangers in* seems to express a warmly humanitarian, religious purpose: non-Jews would not now have to be buried together

with the Hebrews. However, rather than to Gentiles, *strangers (xénois)* may refer merely to Jewish pilgrims whom death overtook at Jerusalem, hence would not have a proper burial place. Either way, the unscrupulousness of these priests is nicely buried under the guise of long-neglected civic responsibility. The blood money has now been laundered by this act of charity.

The supposed contradiction between Matthew and Acts relative to the reason for renaming the field, *the field of blood*, is without foundation. (Cf. Matt. 27:6-9; Acts 1:18f.) In both accounts the same money, "the reward of [Judas'] iniquity," purchased the field. In both cases it was Judas who furnished both the situation and the means whereby this purchase took place, even if others legally acted in his name and with money that remained his even though he were dead. (Cf. other examples of deeds by representative agents, John 19:1; Acts 2:23.) Nowhere did Luke state that Judas kept the money and with it personally bought the field. Even if reading Acts alone seems to suggest this view, Luke's original readers could have compared it with Matthew's account and harmonize them to get all the facts, if they wished, just as we today.

**27:8 Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.** This verse explains the source of a traditional place-name. However, does this make its facts *untrue*, as alleged by some? Matthew and Acts furnish two valid, not irreconcilable reasons for calling the field "Akeldama," *the field of blood*: in both the *blood* in question is primarily that of Christ, for whose betrayal by Judas the *blood* money ("the reward of his iniquity") has been spent. Luke however furnished an additional gory reason to call the terrible place "Akeldama." He revealed a fact Matthew omitted: that the field in question was, by an ironic twist of history, the very one where Judas himself came to a violent end (Acts 1:18f.). Luke's parenthetical remark merely summarizes for his reader's what was already well-known, without disputing Matthew's narrative.

The priests denominated this area "a field to bury strangers in," but popular sentiment, aware of the life-blood which that field represented, gave it a truer name, *The field of blood*, a perpetual reminder that the authorities had not buried their injustice after all.

*Unto this day* dates the writing of Matthew's Gospel as quite some time after the resurrection, time enough for this new local tradition ("Akeldama") to take root in the popular language. However, if the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. may be thought to have

obscured place names as the sites themselves were obliterated under debris, *unto this day* whispers that the Gospel was not penned after that event.

## HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF—ONLY MUCH LOUDER

27:9 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was priced, whom certain of the children of Israel did price. No such text can be found in *Jeremiah* and the evident source of the concept is Zechariah 11:12f. as a comparison of Matthew with Zechariah will show:

### Matthew:

They took the silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.

### Zechariah:

And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter.

That the genuineness of Matthew's quotation cannot be questioned is proven by the surprising observation that its apparent clumsiness vouches for its historicity. A clever forger would have been more careful not to include such palpable blunders as attributing to *Jeremiah* what Zechariah wrote. He would have smoothed out the wrinkles. Attempts to explain why Matthew attributes the prophecy to *Jeremiah the prophet* are various.

### 1. A TEXTUAL EMENDATION IS INVOLVED

- a. Matthew always omitted the name of Zechariah when citing his writings (21:5; 24:31; 26:31). Why not also here? Some ancient translations do not name any prophet at this point. So, perhaps some extremely early, ill-informed scribe, remembering "the potter-passages" of Jeremiah (18:2; 19:2, etc.) inserted *Jeremiah the prophet* by mistake, and this reading became common among the majority of manuscripts. However, see b.
- b. Similarly, some suggest an extremely early scribal error accomplished by a misreading and consequent substitution of only two Greek letters: an "I" for a "Z" and an "M" for an "R." Compare: *ZRIOY* and *IMIOY*, the abbreviated

forms of "Zechariah" and "Jeremiah" respectively. However, the reading, *Jeremiah*, is believed to be firmly established (*Textual Commentary*, 66).

2. A QUESTION OF JEWISH TRADITION IS INVOLVED

- a. Circulating in Matthew's time was a genuine quotation of a now lost writing of Jeremiah himself or perhaps an unwritten, traditional statement attributed to him, i.e. Zechariah recorded oral tradition of Jeremiah's preaching. Accordingly, Matthew finally documents this, pointing not to the man who recorded it, but to him who first pronounced the prophecy. Jewish tradition said, "The spirit of Jeremiah is in Zechariah." Or, vice versa it represents a Jewish deletion of this passage from the canonical Jeremiah (Eusebius, *Dem. Ev.* X,4).
- b. The scroll on which Zechariah was copied bore the name of *Jeremiah*, its leading book. The Talmud calls this roll "Jeremiah," even though it contains Zechariah among the other books. Thus Matthew quotes not an author but a *section* of the Old Testament. (See critical introductions to the Old Testament.) This is a less likely solution, because Matthew wrote, *Jeremiah the prophet*, an expression that would seem not to refer to the organization of the Old Testament on numerous scrolls, but to the man himself.

Whatever the final solution to this problem, despite our present uncertainty as to which is the true explanation, nevertheless, since a number of alternative hypotheses are available, *not charge of contradiction or lapse of memory can be proven against Matthew*. Until a more clearly definitive solution arises, we can simply confess our limitations and await further information.

Perhaps the most satisfactory solution is to see this quotation as a Targum or free paraphrase by Matthew who utilized ideas drawn from both prophets, because of a common key word or subject matter, to summarize both, but attributed the whole to the more important (or better known?) of the two. Rightly Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 948) asked, "Where in Zechariah is there mention of a plot of ground, used for burial purposes, which became known as 'the Field of Blood,' because innocent blood had been shed?" He notes the following parallels from *Jeremiah* 19:

- a. Judah and Jerusalem have shed innocent blood (Jer. 19:4; Matt. 27:4).
- b. Chief priests and elders are mentioned prominently (Jer. 19:1; Matt. 27:3, 6, 7).
- c. A potter is mentioned (Jer. 19:1, 11; Matt. 27:7, 10).
- d. Topheth, that is, the valley of Hinnom—the very valley where, according to tradition, the Potter's Field was located—has its name changed to “the Valley of Slaughter,” which is about the same as “the Field of Blood” (Jer. 19:6; Matt. 27:8; cf. Acts 1:19).
- e. And this valley becomes a well-known “burial place” (Jer. 19:11; Jer. 7:32; Matt. 27:7).

Also possibly parallel to Israel's repudiation of Jesus is Israel's rejection of God's prophet's troublesome preaching of repentance and their attempt to eliminate him on false charges (Jer. 18:15-17).

Perhaps, by writing *Jeremiah*, Matthew intended to draw the reader's attention to concepts in the major prophet which are resumed in Zechariah and succinctly expressed in this latter prophet's words. Matthew even boiled these down to an apt, interpretative statement that appropriately expressed Israel's memorializing its shameful rejection of Christ. In this case Matthew is not so much interested in finding a direct prophecy in Jeremiah 18, 19 and 32 as in pointing out how *both prophets spoke of Israel's contempt for God shown by the nation's ungratefulness for God's blessings, sins which are even more significantly repeated in Israel's repudiation of God's greatest Prophet, the Messiah.*

So, what is Matthew teaching us? From one point of view, the enacted prophecy of the prophet's hurling the miserable sum to the potter is possibly a symbolic forepicturing of the priests' hurling Judas' miserable wages to the potter to buy his field. However, only an amazing correspondence is pointed out between the prophetic words in Jeremiah and Zechariah and the historic event in Jesus' time, without intending a literal fulfillment. (See notes on 2:17.) Accordingly, Matthew finds in this event a *situation* which tragically resembles and culminates the earlier *situation* of God's prophets.

Honing this concept even further, we see that Matthew gives an *interpretative paraphrase* of the prophecy. Rather than quote it verbatim, he explains its meaning, i.e. that Jesus' contemporaries repeated substantially the same rejection of God's prophets as had any previous generation. (Cf. 21:33-39; 22:1-6; 23:29-37.) In Zechariah,

specifically, Israel paid no more than thirty pieces of silver for God's Shepherd. When Israel's authorized representatives similarly valued Jesus at the price of a slave, they merely repeated Israel's chronic shameful contempt for God. The pitiful sum given for the Good Shepherd stands in dramatic contrast with His true value and the high estimation that Israel should have set on Him. They characteristically undervalued God's guidance, hence this insulting wage was once again paid for the services of God's Shepherd, but, in this case, it was God's Son. Nevertheless, it was returned with disdain to the Lord's House. And, by another ironic twist of history this lordly sum went again to pay the potter!

*Thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was priced, whom certain of the children of Israel did price.* Not insignificantly, in Israel it was a priestly function to decide what people were worth (Lev. 27:8). The value the nation, in the person of its authorized representatives, the priests, placed on the services of God's prophet was the ancient, legal price of an injured slave or a woman (Exod. 21:32; Lev. 27:4). So Israel's contempt for the Lord is again repeated in their crass devaluation of His Son. They hated Jesus because they hated the Father who sent Him (10:40; Luke 10:16; John 15:23; 16:3). The treatment of the prophet-shepherd was not accidental, but a true, moral preview of Israel's treatment of the prophet's Lord, Jesus.

**27:10 and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.** Both in the prophecy as well as in the fulfillment God disposed of the money through agents. Because this money was found in the house of the Lord, it was as if God Himself had received it, and the priests, by purchasing the field, unconsciously were throwing His 30 shekels to the potter whose field it was. Their disposition of the money produced an astonishing evocation of the ancient words all in accordance with the will of the Lord. Rather than disappear into the oblivion of the treasury, that blood money was memorialized in the purchase of "the field of Blood," until unbelieving Israel should be destroyed in a City of Blood.

Matthew does not chronicle Judas' death to establish him as a classic example of evil, a monster of wickedness or a man apart. Rather, Judas' is the tragic story of a double-minded disciple who followed Jesus for the wrong motives, whose discipleship was blocked by his refusal to let Jesus be Lord in everything.

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what sense did Judas "repent"? Contrast the repentance of Peter and that of Judas, showing why one led to life and the other to death.
2. What was it that convinced Judas to repent?
3. By whom had Jesus been condemned when Judas saw it and repented?
4. Where and how did Judas return the betrayal money? Where were the priests when he approached them? Defend your answer.
5. On what Scriptural basis could the priests have established their decision to refuse to accept the blood money into the temple treasury?
6. Who were the "strangers" for whom the potter's field was bought as a cemetery? Why should a special cemetery for them be needed?
7. Indicate the source of the prediction Matthew cites as fulfilled here. Who wrote the prophecy? Deal with the supposed contradictions connected with this question.
8. How does the book of Acts report this account? What differences distinguish the two accounts? How harmonize these divergencies?
9. Why was the field called "the field of blood"?

## SECTION 73

JESUS IS TRIED BY PILATE,  
CONDEMNED AND SCOURGED

(Parallels: Mark 15:2-20; Luke 23:1-25; John 18:28—19:16)

TEXT: 27:2, 11-31

2 and they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him up to Pilate the governor.

.....

11 Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest. 12 And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. 13 Then saith Pilate unto him, Hearst thou now how many things they witness against thee? 14 And he gave him no answer, not even to one word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. 15 Now at the feast the governor was

went to release unto the multitude one prisoner, whom they would. 16 And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, whom will ye that I released unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ? 18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him up. 19 And while he was sitting on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. 20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. 21 But the governor answered and said unto them, Which of the two will ye that I release unto you? And they said, Barabbas. 22 Pilate saith unto them, What then shall I do unto Jesus who is called Christ? They all say, Let him be crucified. 23 And he said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out exceedingly, saying, Let him be crucified. 24 So when Pilate saw that he prevailed nothing, but rather that a tumult was arising, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man; see ye *to it*. 25 And all the people answered and said, His blood *be* on us, and on our children. 26 Then released he unto them Barabbas; but Jesus he scourged and delivered to be crucified.

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium, and gathered unto him the whole band. 28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. 29 And they platted crown of thorns and put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they kneeled down before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! 30 And they spat upon him, and took the reed and smote him on the head. 31 And when they had mocked him, they took off from him the robe, and put on him his garments, and led him away to crucify him.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Where did Pilate get the idea Jesus claimed to be a King of the Jews?
- b. Even though the authorities charged Jesus with perverting the nation, refusing to give tribute to Caesar and claiming to be a king, why do you suppose Matthew limited the interrogation by Pilate to the latter accusation?

- c. Why did Jesus say, "You have said so" instead of answering frankly "Yes" or "No"?
- d. Why did not Jesus answer the charges laid against Him?
- e. What made Pilate marvel at Jesus' silence?
- f. What do you think caused Pilate to decide so rapidly that Jesus was innocent, even though He admitted to being a king?
- g. Why was a choice offered between Jesus and Barabbas? If Pilate really wanted justice for Jesus, why refer so important a choice to a mob like that?
- h. Why do you think Pilate limited the choice of prisoners for release just to these two?
- i. How do you suppose the governor learned the true, secret motive for the leaders' determination to eliminate Jesus?
- j. If Pilate knew Jesus were innocent, why did he not acquit Him immediately and throw the hierarchy's case out of court?
- k. What is your opinion of Pilate's wife's dream? Was it from God? or the natural result of her own perplexity about Jesus? What effect do you think her urgent message had on Pilate's judgment?
- l. In the shouts of "Crucify Him! Away with Him!" do you see any evidence of fickleness in the crowds? Are these the same people who a few days before yelled, "Hosanna to the Son of David"?
- m. Why do you think Pilate finally gave up trying to defend Jesus' right to a fair trial? Why would he have been so anxious to please the Jewish people? Was it his nature to be conciliatory?
- n. What could have caused the riot that Pilate so deeply feared?
- o. The crowds yelled, "His blood be on us and on our children." Do you think God gave them their wish? In what way(s)?
- p. Do you think Pilate's act of washing his hands before the multitude really freed him from responsibility for Jesus' political assassination?
- q. Why did Pilate scourge Jesus, if he was so sure of His innocence? What would he have done to Him if he thought he were guilty?!
- r. Why did the soldiers cruelly mock Jesus? Does not even a condemned man have rights?
- s. What does Jesus' behavior under fire reveal about Him? How does His example help you?
- t. How does Pilate's behavior under fire differ from yours when called upon to stand up for truth and righteousness? In what shameful ways are we tempted to repeat his moral spinelessness?

- u. Despite the fact that the political charges against Him were false, do you think Jesus was a politician in any sense? Did He intend to form public policy? To what extent?
- v. Since the major responsibility for Jesus' death lies with the people of God, what lessons come out of this realization?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The entire Sanhedrin stood up, tied Jesus and led Him from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor and turned Him over to Pilate. It was early in the morning. They personally did not enter the governor's palace, so as to avoid ceremonial uncleanness and be able to eat the festal meals of the Passover week. So Pilate went outside to them.

"What charge do you bring against this man?" Pilate began.

"If this guy had not done something wrong," they snapped, "we would not have handed him over to you!"

To this Pilate retorted, "All right, YOU take him and judge him under your own law!"

To this the Jews objected, "But we are not permitted to execute anyone." (This is how Jesus' words came true when He predicted the nature of His impending death.) They opened their case against Jesus, alleging, "We discovered this fellow subverting our nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar and asserting that he himself is an anointed king."

Pilate re-entered the palace and summoned Jesus. When He stood before the governor, Pilate put this question to Him: "Are YOU the King of the Jews?"

"Are you using the word 'king' as YOU would use it (to mean rebel against Roman authority)," Jesus countered, "or as others would use it (to mean Hebrew Messiah)?"

"I am not a Jew, am I?" Pilate objected. "It was your own people and the hierarchy that turned you over to me! What have you done anyway?"

"I am not an earthly king," Jesus responded. "If I were, my men would be fighting to prevent my being handed over to the Jews. My kingdom, however, does not have its source in this sort of thing."

Pilate pressed Him, "So you ARE a king?"

"Yes, you may say that I am a king," Jesus responded. "The very reason I was born and the task for which I came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone who is open to truth listens to me."

“What is truth?” Pilate mused. So saying, he went back outside to the Jewish authorities and the crowd and announced, “As far as I’m concerned, I find no basis for a charge against this man.”

The religious authorities began multiplying accusations against Jesus. Confronted by these charges, He made no defense. So Pilate questioned Him once more, “Have you nothing to say for yourself? Do you not hear all the accusations they level against you?”

Nevertheless, He offered no rebuttal, not even to one single charge. The governor was completely astounded. But the priests persisted, “He’s a rabble-rouser, teaching all over the land of the Jews. He began in Galilee and has come all the way here!”

When Pilate heard “Galilee,” he wondered whether Jesus might be a Galilean. Upon ascertaining that He came under Herod’s jurisdiction, he referred the case of Herod, who was personally present in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was uncommonly pleased, because he had been wanting to have a look at Him for a long time. He had been hearing about Him and was even hoping to see Him perform some miracle. Although Herod plied Him with many questions, Jesus completely ignored them. The hierarchy and the theologians stood by, violently pressing their accusations. Then Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt and made fun of Him. Then they dressed Him in an elegant robe and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Herod and Pilate became personal friends. Previously, in fact, they had been mutual enemies.

Pilate reconvened the religious and civil authorities and the people. “You have brought this man before me,” he began, “on a charge of subversion. Here I have examined him in your presence, but I find him not guilty of any of your accusations against him. So did Herod, so he referred him back to us. Clearly, he has done nothing to deserve death. I propose, therefore, to have him whipped and released.”

Now at every Passover festival it was customary for the governor to grant amnesty to one prisoner, anyone the crowd chose. However, among the revolutionaries in jail for assassinating someone during the uprising, there was a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. So when the crowd went up to petition Pilate to grant them the usual privilege, Pilate said, “You have a custom that I should release one man for you during the Passover festival. Whom do you want me to release for you? Jesus Barabbas or Jesus the so-called Christ, ‘the king of the Jews’?” (In fact, he well knew that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him because they were jealous.)

While Pilate was sitting on the tribunal, his wife sent him a message that read, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man. In fact, I have suffered a great deal today because of a dream I had about him."

Meanwhile, however, the religious and civil authorities instigated the mob to demand the release of Barabbas to them and to demand Jesus' execution. So, when the governor repeated his question, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" they all yelled with one voice, "Not this guy! Get him out of here! We want Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a brigand who had been imprisoned for an insurrection that had broken out in the city and for murder.

Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate addressed them once more, "But in that case, what am I to do with Jesus, the man you call Christ, the King of the Jews?"

Again they all roared back, "To the cross with him! Nail him to a cross!"

For the third time Pilate argued with them, "Why? What harm has he done? I have found in him no basis for the death penalty! I repeat: I will just punish him and let him go."

At this Pilate took Jesus and had Him lashed with a scourge. The soldiers twisted a thorny wreath and crowned Him with it, and threw over Him a reddish-purple cloak. They came up to Him repeatedly, saying, "O King of the Jews, we salute you!" then slapped Him in the face.

Pilate went out again and addressed the Jews, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to show you that I find him not guilty!"

So Jesus came out, wearing the thorny crown and the purple robe. Pilate proclaimed, "Here is the man!"

When the chief priests and their henchmen caught sight of Him, they roared, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Pilate, exasperated, retorted, "YOU take him and do the crucifying! I find him NOT GUILTY!"

"We have a law," the Jews returned, "and by that law he ought to die, because he claimed to be God's Son."

When Pilate heard this, he became deeply alarmed. He went back into the palace again and quizzed Jesus, "Where ARE you from anyway?!"

Jesus, however, gave him no answer. So Pilate continued, "You refuse to talk to me? Don't you realize that I have the authority to set you free and the authority to nail you to a cross?!"

"You would have no authority over me," Jesus began, "if it had not been delegated to you from God. This is why the people who handed me over to you are guilty of the greater injustice."

From this point on Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let that man go, you are no friend of Caesar! Anyone who claims to be a king defies Caesar!"

When Pilate heard this, he had Jesus brought out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place called "the Stone Pavement." (*Gabbatha* is the Hebrew word for it.) The time was now about six o'clock in the morning on Friday of Passover week. Pilate announced to the Jews, "Here is your King! But they kept insisting, shouting all the louder and demanding, "Take him away! Get him out of here! Hang him on a cross!"

"Shall I crucify your king?!" demanded Pilate.

"We have no king," the chief priests replied, "but Caesar!"

So, when Pilate realized that he was getting nowhere and a riot was brewing, he took water and washed his hands in the presence of the crowd, affirming, "I am not responsible for this man's death. It is your concern."

At this all the people shouted back, "We'll take the responsibility for his death—we and our descendants!"

Their shouting won the battle. Pilate decided to grant their demands. Desiring to satisfy the people, he released the man who had been imprisoned for terrorism, the one they wanted, even Barabbas! Having already scourged Jesus, he surrendered Him over to them to be crucified just as they desired.

Then the governor's soldiers led Jesus away into the courtyard of the barracks (i.e. the governor's headquarters). There they mustered the entire battalion before Jesus. Next they stripped Him and robed Him in a scarlet mantle. Weaving a wreath of thorny branches they put it on His head, and placed a reed staff in His right hand. They bowed low before Him in mock salute: "Long live the King of the Jews!" They spit on Him and took the reed and began beating Him over the head with it. After this mockery was over, they stripped Him of the purple cloak, and dressed Him in His own clothes and led Him out to be crucified.

## SUMMARY

After all-night trials before Jewish authorities, in the early morning hours Jesus was tried hurriedly by the entire Sanhedrin, hauled before Pilate who quickly recognized Jesus' innocence of the charges of political insurrection. This verdict was confirmed by Herod and a

dream of Pilate's wife. Pilate drove for an easy compromise by proposing to release Jesus under the Passover-amnesty, and then by trying to arouse sympathy for Jesus by scourging Him. None of this dallying worked to convince the adamant Jewish opposition to Jesus. Rather, the mob howled for the release of a terrorist and for the execution of Pilate's uncondemned prisoner, Jesus. Before the final verdict Pilate wavered toward outright sympathy for Jesus, but at last crumbled before political blackmail. Jesus was mocked by Pilate's and Herod's men. Throughout the barrage of Jewish accusations and Roman crudity, Jesus maintained a majestic calm, His spirit under God's control, saying nothing more than absolutely necessary to affirm His true mission and identity.

## NOTES

### THE JUDGE ON TRIAL

Our Lord who will judge the world in righteousness permitted Himself to be tried and condemned before such sinners, even though "He had done no violence nor was any deceit in his mouth" (Isa. 53:9). He knew where this was all leading, and was prepared to go to the limit undeservedly!

For Jesus' consignment to *Pilate*, see on 27:2. Pilate was both *procurator* and *prefect*. An agent of the emperor to whom he was directly responsible for the management of the financial affairs of the province, he was *procurator* (Tacitus, *Annals*, XV, 44). As administrative official and magistrate over the province of Judea, he was *prefect*. (Concerning *Pilate*, cf. *Ant.* XVIII, 2, 2; 3, 1f.; 4: 1f.; *Wars*, II, 9, 2-4.) His long administration was due more to Tiberius' negligence than to Pilate's virtue as a ruler (*Ant.* XVIII 6, 5).

Prefect he was; perfect he was not. That he was given to maladministration was no secret. Philo of Alexandria wrote a letter to the Emperor Caligula for Herod Agrippa I, characterizing this procurator as "inflexible, merciless and stubborn." Among the defects of his administration are cited "fraud, violence, theft, torture, insults, frequent executions without due trial and a constant, intolerable cruelty" (*De Legatione ad Caium* § 38). Even though the Jews considered Pilate cruel, when it is their turn to be crude and cruel, they need him. Often visible in Jesus' trial is an abandonment of strict justice in favor of expediency that seems to be characteristic of the man. Even though he was not given to compliant accommodation, his

political wisdom would demand he be no more provocative than necessary. In fact, the priestly aristocracy had few serious problems with Pilate, since in the ten years of his mandate (26-36 A.D.), he never substituted Caiaphas, high priest from 18-37 A.D. But an uneasy calm does not mean peace or agreement when it is merely a cease-fire and the protagonists continue to maneuver for supremacy. So it must not be supposed that Pilate would *willingly* collaborate with the aristocracy to eliminate Jesus as a favor to them.

The Jewish rulers knew their man and the strategy to use to break him. They simply pressured him constantly until he cracked. That he would crumble was never in question, the only uncertainty being how soon. On both sides, when one tactic failed, another was introduced. The Jews simply had more flexibility, more determination to achieve their goal and more audacity.

Summarizing, Matthew focuses on the main points of Pilate's interrogation, without specifying, however, what the Roman knew about the case or the reason for his questions. While Jesus was hauled inside the Praetorium, His legalistic accusers, refusing to enter a contaminating pagan building, piously waited outside. There Pilate, deferring to their scruples, met them to learn the nature of the charges lodged against Jesus (John 18:28f.).

PLAN A: They attempt to bluff the Prefect into signing Jesus' death warrant without opening the case. Labelling Jesus an "evil-doer" they both imply they have already judged Him by due process of Jewish law and that Pilate should simply rubber-stamp the verdict of their court. Grasping their insinuation, he implied that, if the obvious Jewishness of the question rendered it so difficult of explanation before a Roman tribunal, they themselves should try the case. (Cf. Acts 18:12-15.) He did not wish to embroil himself in a local religious quarrel. Since he did not foresee a capital sentence involved, it is clear he had no secret agreement with Caiaphas to eliminate a mutual Enemy, as some suspect. The rulers are thus forced to uncover their own judiciary impotence: legally, they themselves cannot execute the death penalty (John 18:29-32). Even if, as some affirm on the basis of texts such as *Ant.* XX,9,1; *Wars* VI,2,4; Acts 6:12—7:60; 22:30; 21:28f.; 22:30; 25:9-11; possibly *Mishna, Sanh.* 7.1f.; *Gemara* 52b; *Tosephta* 9.11, the Sanhedrin could pronounce a death sentence in *religious* cases, they had cut the ground from under themselves by referring Jesus' case to Pilate on a strictly *political* charge.

The same authority that had stripped this high council of the power of the death penalty also required the Roman judges to examine capital

cases, not privately, but publicly; not on vague suspicions but on specific accusations. In harmony with the essentially public character of Roman justice (cf. Acts 16:19f.; 17:6; 18:12, 17; 25:6f.; *War* II, 9, 3; II, 14, 8), this Roman magistrate justly refused to hand down a death penalty in a case untried by him. So, he rightly chose to open and try the case himself.

PLAN B: They are forced to prefer formal charges on which to proceed legally against the Defendant: "We found this man subverting our nation, He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar, and claims to be Christ a king" (Luke 23:2). These three accusations rise in a crescendo from a generic indictment of subversion to two specific counts of hostility to Roman authority, that culminate in His claim to be an anointed monarch (*christòn basiléa*). The real charge, blasphemy, is carefully kept out of sight, lest the Procurator throw their case out of court without even hearing it (cf. Acts 18:14-16).

The clergy's procedure is completely unprincipled. There is no objective validity in their blatantly political accusation that Jesus claims to be *king of the Jews*, because they attribute to Him their own subjective views as to what Messiahship means. If, as they conceived it, political and military power were wrapped up in Messiahship, then, for Jesus to claim to be "Son of David," hence truly *king of the Jews*, is tantamount to claiming to be supernatural Ruler, the Son of man and Son of God and claiming the right to exercise His regal power on behalf of Israel against all her enemies, now particularly Rome! So, from their own standpoint, it is not completely correct to say that the Jews radically transformed their own religious quarrels into political accusations of such a nature as would interest the governor, because, for them, the true Messiah would be both religious, political and supernatural. They had astutely formulated an indictment large enough to convict Jesus before any court, Roman or Jewish.

### Two judges meet

**27:11 Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest. In the Praetorium now, Jesus stood before the governor.** Anyone, whose scruples permitted him to enter, could witness this interrogation.

This experienced governor knew men and could sense that this quiet, dignified man before him was perhaps a harmless religious fanatic, but certainly no wild-eyed revolutionary or rival claimant to Caesar's authority. The situation was too unreal for Pilate to take the charge seriously, but, for form's sake, he must ask this ridiculous question. Selecting the main thrust of the accusations, Pilate perhaps meant, "Do YOU, who lack every indication of proud ambition and the other marks of world power, claim to be the Jew's king?"

However, this question contains an unfortunate misunderstanding. *King of the Jews* smacks of a state title as compared with the more intimately religious expression, "the King of Israel" (27:42; cf. John 1:49). So, before answering it, the Lord must clarify the issue, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me" (John 18:34)?

1. The question is not Pilate's own desire to know about God's Messianic Kingdom. This is but the opening gambit of the trial. The personality of Jesus had not yet begun to produce any effect on Pilate. Instead, he is repeating only the Jewish charges.
2. Further, if the question were Pilate's own, the title, *the King of the Jews*, would suggest seditious connotations, but if Jewish, Jesus could explain its true Messianic connotations.

Although Pilate comprehended Him, as a Roman he denied sharing Jewish expectations, implying no personal interest in such things. He had based this question on strictly Jewish premises. Then, to clarify the indefinite, blanket accusations, Pilate tried a direct approach, pressing his Prisoner to talk about His activities. Jesus explained simply that the essentially unworldly character of His royal authority excluded any earthly political ambitions, Jewish or Gentile. This excludes the use of contemporary world power to establish the universal supremacy He envisioned. That no military uprising had materialized to rescue Him was circumstantial evidence that His dominion is not a thing of this world. Still perplexed, Pilate came back, "So you are a king after all" (John 18:33-37)?

*Thou sayest* implies, therefore, "The words are yours. I must qualify the terminology, inasmuch as it does not accurately reflect my own view of my identity. I cannot answer your question with an unqualified yes or no, but I shall answer it, Yes, with reservations." (See notes on 26:64.) Some editors see Jesus' answer in all four Gospels (*sù legeis hòti basileùs eimi*) as a question: "Would you say sō

[that I am a king]?" Using Pilate's own definition of "king," Jesus challenged him to decide on the basis of the knowable facts of His life, ministry and movement. To interpret Jesus' answer this way neither considers it a "doubtful answer" nor ambiguous, as if the doubt were His, but to show by what route Jesus amply removed the doubt concerning the meaning of Pilate's words. To clarify a doubt does not create ambiguity, but removes it.

Next, the Lord proceeded to explain of what sort kingdom He is ruler. The sovereignty of truth, rather than military might or political acumen, is the basis of the Kingdom over which He was born to rule (John 18:37, 38). His Kingdom's universal character denied exclusively Jewish privilege and was open to "everyone who is of the truth [and] hears my voice" (John 18:37). Although the superficial Pilate, governed by a worldly realism, failed to see how idealistic, absolute truth could have anything concrete to do with earthly rule, he correctly grasped that this divine realism was the true sense in which Jesus claimed to be *King of the Jews*. (Cf. Zech. 9:9; Isa. 9:6; Ps. 2:6; 110:1, etc.) In this light, Pilate could only acquit Jesus of being a political agitator.

At this point Pilate went out to the Jews and announced Jesus' acquittal (John 18:38). The trial should have been over, but Pilate lacked the decisiveness and conscience of a Claudius Lysias to throw Roman power into the equation and save Jesus. (Cf. Acts 23:16-35.) There followed no order to release the Nazarene, no dismissal of the throng, nothing. Pilate's first judicial error was perhaps perceived essential to avoid turning his audience into bitter accusers before Tiberius.

He apparently took Jesus outside with him (John 18:38; cf. Matt. 26:12f.). This afforded him opportunity for a direct confrontation between the accusers and the Accused. Furious over the Roman acquittal, the chief priests opened fire, unleashing an avalanche of imputations (Mark 15:3). Perhaps they poured out details to support the initial charges (Luke 23:2): "He stirs up the people teaching through all Judea, from Galilee even to this place" (Luke 23:5). The thrust of these furious efforts would be to establish the widespread character of His defiance toward the authorities, their traditional law and leadership, pointing to a rebellious spirit toward authority capable of deep hostility toward Roman supremacy.

## Majestic silence

27:12 **And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered them nothing.** Jesus' attackers are one solid front: *elders*, i.e. Sanhedrinists, *and the chief priests*. Matthew's one article treats both groups as one unit. For both of these holders of religio-political power Jesus was a danger because in various ways He put in doubt some of the fundamental tenets of traditional Judaism (12:8; 15:1-20; John 4:21; Mark 7:19, etc.). His preaching of the Kingdom of God, even if theoretically the hope of the aristocracy too, could be interpreted as a threat to their political and social position.

Having already answered the one question on which His testimony was required, *He answered them nothing*. Why should He participate in a mindless debate where only irreligious political considerations are paramount, its sinister charges false and no one is seriously interested in the truth? (Cf. Isa. 50:6-9.) Here is exemplified the moral power of a God-controlled life under fire: "when they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly" (I Peter 2:18ff.).

## Magnificent imperturbability under strain

23:13 **Then saith Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?** Having observed the Lord's un-fanatical, deep sincerity and wisdom, the procurator recognized how unfounded were the charges, but, as dispassionate magistrate, he could not appear to favor the accused by answering them himself. It was up to Jesus to refute them. Pilate had never concluded a trial where there were no counter-arguments. Had Jesus answered the charges, He would have relieved Pilate of the responsibility.

Jesus, the man who had a brilliant comeback for everyone, should be worshipped not only for His treasured sayings, but also for His marvellous silence in the presence of people who prejudged Him and whose only principle of truth and justice was a calculating pragmatism. Such prejudice and expediency has no taste for final truth. Neither takes the Lord seriously, so why should He talk?

## The might of meekness

27:14 **And he gave him no answer, not even to one word: insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.** Pilate is surprised and perplexed

by Jesus' adamant silence, because He had been so pleasant and helpful before. Why not talk now? Was he above all fear of death? He was certainly not the political trouble-maker of wild-eyed demagogue the authorities had described Him to be. The judge sees Him as the victim of a vicious plot, admirably unmoved by the ferocity of His enemies and patient to a fault.

Yet His mysterious suffering in silence is not the dumbness of stupidity but the discipline of self-possession. His consciousness of mission gave Him moral power immeasurably superior to His seemingly powerful accusers. While everyone around wavered or plotted, Jesus continued to keep His mind on what was really happening:

1. Jesus knew that, without His making a strenuous personal defense, Pilate could discern for himself the falseness and ill-disgusted malice of the charges. No rebuttal is so powerful as that which arises from arguments supplied by the opposition.
2. Without disrespect for this court, Jesus need not answer charges which its judge had already recognized as unfounded (Luke 23:4; John 18:38). Did Pilate's former verdict mean nothing?
3. Would Pilate have had the moral courage to free Him, had He satisfactorily silenced every charge?
4. Even if arguments and counter-arguments could keep such dead-end investigations going for months, Jesus is not here to win the debate or be justified, but to give His life for the sins of the world. He would not now frustrate the reason for His whole earthly mission (20:28; John 12:23-33).
5. Jesus could wait for His truer, worthier justification in the Father's approval (John 5:41, 44; 7:18). Pilate could not guess, however, that Jesus' impressive silence had already been decided long before (Isa. 53:7).

The prefect was bogged down in the uncomfortable dilemma of doing his duty as an objective magistrate in which case he must anger the Jewish high council and commit political suicide or please the Jews, corrupt his office and commit moral suicide. Just then the chance word, "Galilee," in the prosecution's desperate harangue suggested a possible escape: the embarrassing Prisoner is a Galilean, therefore, under the jurisdiction of Herod to whom He could be referred (Luke 23:5-12). This is another error, because why, after acquitting Him, send Jesus to Antipas? The trial has started to slide into bargaining and maneuvering that will become uncontrollable.

However, Pilate was to learn that his clever little master-stroke of diplomacy only half-succeeded. Even if the petty king deeply appreciated the unexpected courtesy (cf. Luke 9:9) and became his ally, nevertheless, this shrewd politician bounced the responsibility back into Pilate's court. Unfortunately for Pilate, the delay of sending Jesus to Herod gave the hierarchy time to regroup and organize their strategy to demand the release of Barabbas (Mark 15:8).

Nevertheless, the interrogation before Herod, reported in Pilate's summation (Luke 23:14f.), served to underscore Jesus' innocence recognized by all magistrates to whom His case was submitted. (It is unlikely that jealous Antipas would have returned a really guilty man to his Roman rival with whom he appears to have had a jurisdictional dispute.) As protectors of the innocent, both Herod and Pilate were obligated to acquit Jesus without hesitation. But because both men declined to save Jesus despite the falsity of the charges against Him, history rightly charges them with moral complicity along with the Sanhedrin and priesthood (Acts 4:25-27).

In fact, Pilate was on the point of releasing Jesus when he wavered. First, he inconsistently expressed willingness to scourge an innocent man to pacify the priests. These, however, discerned that a magistrate who offered to concede this much might yet be pressured to give the death sentence (Luke 23:16). To break him, all they needed was patience.

Next, the idea of liberating the Nazarene gave him another idea: why not liberate Him as an act of clemency?

### THE BLOCKED EMERGENCY EXIT

**27:15 Now at the feast the governor was wont to release unto the multitudes one prisoner, whom they would.** Of apparently Jewish origin (cf. John 18:39: "You have a custom"), this practice was continued by Roman rulers to foster political good-will toward Rome in this occupied, restless nation, by releasing *one prisoner* among the Jews' countrymen. (Cf. *Ant.* XX,9,3.) *At the feast (katà heortên:* "feast after feast") seems to be a general expression for the celebration, not necessarily to the supper itself. (Cf. "at the Passover" John 18:39.)

Was this custom first appealed to by Pilate as an excuse for releasing Jesus (cf. John 18:39), or by the Jews who, upon hearing Pilate's proposal to release Jesus, are reminded of this yearly custom and

so appeal to its usual terms to get what they want? Or was this mechanism urged by a disciple in a futile, desperate effort to save Jesus, which His enemies twisted into a weapon against Him? (Cf. Mark 15:8; see the PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY for my tentative sequence of events.) Whatever the sequence, it is clear that, to deflect their unreasoning fury from Jesus, Pilate promptly seized upon this suggestion, hoping to appeal to the best in these men by presenting a prisoner already sufficiently punished as the candidate for liberation this year. However, this gave the people, rather than the governor, the right to name the man to be released. Even so, Pilate is prepared to take this risk, because it would verify his suspicion that Jesus' popularity, rather than treason, lay at the base of the jealousy of the ruling class.

Although the *official* antagonism to Jesus had turned up nothing concretely treasonable, Pilate's political sixth sense may have detected further developments possible in the case. What did *the people* think about a political king? Pilate would not be as much interested in whether Jesus or anyone else considered himself a political messiah, as in *whether* the people thought He was and *why*. So, if they chose to follow this harmless Teacher, as Pilate imagined they would, Rome would have no problems from Him or them. If they chose the true terrorist instead, real trouble was ahead for Roman authority. In this event Barabbas would serve contemporaneously as a test case to measure this danger and as a means to save Jesus.

### THE TRUE ALTERNATIVE TO JESUS CHRIST

27:16 **And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.** A *notable prisoner* indeed! The chance pawn in this dirty game was apparently one of several notorious terrorists who had "committed murder to the insurrection" (Mark 15:7) which "started in the city" of Jerusalem (Luke 23:19, 25). Further, John (18:40) indicates: "Now Barabbas was a robber" (*leistés*). Although *leistés* certainly is a "robber, highwayman, bandit," this term also depicted a "revolutionary, insurrectionist" (Arndt-Gingrich, 474; Rocci, 1144). When the campaigns of the underground do not enjoy adequate financial backing, its clandestine activities must be financed by banditry. (Cf. Josephus, *Wars* II,12,5; cf. *Ant.* XVIII, 1,1; XVII,10.)

While both Roman and Jewish authorities agreed that upsetting the status quo was as unwelcome as it was dangerous, they would not

necessarily have agreed on *what* should be done with these insurrectionists or *when*.

1. The Roman governor could consider it his duty to crucify these terrorists, making it indisputably clear by this show of Roman justice who is really in power and what happens to those brazen souls that dare defy the Empire. The maximum effect could be gained by such exemplary executions especially on a feast day when Jerusalem would be crowded with pilgrims from all over the Empire. (Cf. Varus' iron-fisted approach: *Wars*, II,5,2.)
2. The Jewish authorities could well surmise that other Jewish terrorists would vindicate the death of its popular patriotic heroes, and the escalation must explode in revolt. (Cf. *Ant.* XVII,6,2-4; 9:1-3.) Therefore, the charged atmosphere of a feast like the Passover was the worst possible moment for eliminating elements subversive even to the Jewish authorities themselves. (Cf. *Wars* II,12,1.)

Consequently, even though the Sadducean priesthood, because of its virtual dependence upon Rome, was favorable to the execution of all subversives, since an explosive Jewish Palestine Liberation Organization threatened the delicate balance in the political and economic interests of Caiaphas and company, these latter must have clearly discerned that, to avoid touching off an explosive grass-roots rebellion, *they must save the life of Barabbas almost as much as they must eliminate the Nazarene.*

### A chance pawn in a dirty game

**27:17** **When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?** The Jews' gathering together suggests two situations that are not mutually exclusive:

1. A temporary recess had been called while Jesus was sent to Herod (Luke 23:7-16). The elders, chief priests and their henchmen are now reassembled. Their numbers could qualify as a "crowd" (Mark 15:8).
2. A crowd is beginning to gather outside the Praetorium as word of the trial spreads over the city (27:17; Mark 15:8).

So, if Pilate grasped the political tensions which dictated the choices of the Jewish politicians, he could pit their own fears against them and save the Nazarene rabbi. Pilate was no fool. He too sensed that the

charged atmosphere of a popular feast was no time to make an exaggerated display of Roman force by crucifying the insurrectionists without risking the very peace he was charged with maintaining.

His ploy is to play these two radically contrasting types of men against each other in the hope that the Jews themselves would have understood that there is no serious reason to execute Jesus. By presenting the Jewish public with a relatively easy either/or choice, they would be morally bound to request the release of Jesus. Further, he perceived that if he could succeed in dividing the Jewish public from their leadership—had not the masses enthusiastically acclaimed the Galilean a few days earlier?—he could hope these popular supporters could out-shout the rulers and rescue Jesus. This would free Pilate to crucify Barabbas later and Roman justice would be satisfied.

Some manuscripts write the terrorist's name "Jesus Barabbas." (Cf. *A Textual Commentary*, 67f.) It would appear that Barabbas' personal name was Jesus, and was suppressed by Christian scribes out of reverence for Christ. Whether Pilate understood it or not, Jewish listeners could catch the striking word-play in the governor's options: Jesus (= "Savior") *Barabbas* (= "son of a father") or *Jesus* (= "Savior") *who is called Christ*, who had called God His Father.

*Jesus who is called Christ* is not Pilate's sarcastic invention nor the dreamed-up conviction of his wife, but the authorities' original accusation (Luke 23:2). That Mark and John substitute "the King of the Jews" for *Christ*, suggests that these terms were in some sense synonymous and echo the authorities' charge. Further, by using this title, he reminded any friends Jesus had in the crowd of His claim to be Messiah, expecting them to react positively to the Man who just a day or so before was thus acclaimed by so many. It also handed Pilate the advantage of sounding out the crowd's attitude toward a title which their rulers considered a terrible insult when applied to Jesus. This choice had all the advantages. So what could go wrong? But Pilate was not to crawl out of his dilemma so easily.

### The real motivation

**27:18** For he knew that for envy they had delivered him up. The requirements of his office demanded that Pilate cultivate informers among the Jews to keep him abreast of events and current opinion. He

was aware that the Galilean's real crime was not insurrection, about which the rulers would be considerably less concerned, but the intolerable competition of His wide popularity and influence as a teacher. The prefect could guess that, if Jesus were really guilty of the crimes attributed to Him, He would not be the object of such violent hatred as these Sanhedrinists and priests manifest. The simplest explanation for their behavior is that they were uncontrollably jealous of Him.

### An unsolicited vote for Jesus

**27:19** And while he was sitting on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. Pilate has taken his place on the judge's bench (*béma*) located at "the Pavement" (John 19:13). His own conclusions reassured by Herod's favorable finding, the Prefect launched his "easy alternative," and now awaits the Jewish answer. At this point he is interrupted by an urgent note from his wife.

Her husband had arisen early to open the Roman tribunal for justice. Sleeping late, she was shaken by a vivid dream so convincing that she felt compelled to warn Pilate against trifling with the guileless Jesus. Whether or not this Roman gave particular credence or signs as from God, this ominous message clearly confirmed the conclusion to which he himself had already come: Jesus is innocent.

But his wife's advice was to prove impossible. To *have nothing to do with that righteous man* was something Pilate could *not* do. Although he must decide, he was trying every means to escape his responsibility as judge. He should simply have thrown the case out of court, but he chose not to.

Is it significant for Matthew's readers that, beside Pilates' feeble efforts, the only voice raised in Jesus' defense in that terrible hour was that of *a Gentile woman*? Did God speak to her as to the other Roman, Cornelius (Acts 10)? Was the timing planned to be God's merciful second warning to Pilate to beware of trifling with truth and to defend Him in justice? Why record this weird, eventually ineffectual dream? Did God wish the guiltlessness of His Son established beyond all doubt, even defended by *a Gentile woman*?

When in doubt, let others do your thinking

**27:20** Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. While it is

unquestionably *the chief priests* and their associates who lead the drive for Jesus' destruction, *the elders* "of the people" (cf. 26:3, 47, 57, 59; 27:1, 3, 41, 62?; 28:12) are as much involved in *persuading the multitudes to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus* as are the ecclesiastics. The united shout of these august elders of Israel in the front row alone would effectively sway the others. Taking no chances, they and their henchmen also actively infiltrated the crowd to advise and intimidate, inciting it to act. (*anéseisan* > *se ò*, "shake up, stir up, instigate." cf. Mark 15:11). As the crowd grew, every new-comer could be "instructed" how to vote when the issue was raised. With what arguments? A vote for Barabbas was a vote for nationalism and freedom. As for the Galilean prophet, had not the nation's highest tribunal itself heard His "blasphemy?" No one is allowed to see the contradiction that Jesus is accused before Pilate of the same crime for which they recommend Barabbas to the people.

Were there any present who, just a few days earlier, had shouted, "Hosanna"? Although it is quite possible that, at this early morning hour, few if any of Jesus' Galilean followers were stirring or had yet learned of His betrayal, arrests and trials, nevertheless, in a city where the many transfers of Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate to Herod and back would not be missed and the excited word-of-mouth news of His trials must have sent a shock-wave of horror among His followers, why would they not appear? But if some disciples came, their shock at seeing their presumed Messiah dragged around as a beaten man in the hands of a pagan prefect may have proved too much. How could that poor beggar be the true Christ of God? Again, lately He had not acted much like a world leader, refusing to use His supernatural power to obliterate opposition to His program. So their own deep doubts and disillusionment, the unrelenting pressure of the priests' partisans and the anonymity of the crowd conspired to counsel this radical shift of loyalty, making them quite ready to yell for the "imposter's" death.

However, the suspicion that the crowds were fickle may itself be unjust. Granted, Sunday's hero may become Friday's criminal in the popular ratings. But that crowd at the Praetorium and those shouting Hosanna at the Triumphal Entry *may not be the same people*, because Matthew clearly distinguished the Jerusalemites from Jesus' supporters (21:10f.). Who can deny that the voices of any friends of Jesus would have been totally ignored, shouted down or completely unheard in the roar of the multitude?

## The moment of truth

27:21 **But the governor answered and said unto them, Which of the two will ye that I release unto you? And they said, Barabbas.** Perhaps bringing out the two men together in the prevailing juridical confusion, Pilate called for a decision. But under the influence of the hierarchy, the crowds bypassed Pilate's candidate in favor of Barabbas, perhaps even admired by the baser elements of this mob. In a wall of sound his answer came back, *Barabbas!* (Luke 23:18). Although true before, now as never, our Lord "was despised and rejected by men" (Isa. 53:3).

## The inescapable question

27:22 **Pilate saith unto them, What then shall I do unto Jesus who is called Christ? They all say, Let him be crucified.** Pilate found himself, not with a neat political solution, but obligated to release a dangerous criminal and with Jesus still on his hands for judgment. In addressing them once more Pilate desired to release Jesus (Luke 23:20).

Some attack Pilate's question as devoid of historical authenticity, because it could hardly be admitted that a Roman governor would submit the choice of punishment for the prisoner *not* to be released. He could dicker with them over *which* prisoner to release, given the annual custom to liberate one. But by what rule would he barter with them over the *sentencing* of the other? But is this the correct question? Granted, Pilate appears incredibly willing to leave the fate of Jesus to their caprice. But does this simply prove that the man fell beneath the responsibilities of his high office? Many anomalies in this trial find their explanation in Pilate's character.

*They all say, Let him be crucified.* Their repeated, vehement reply is unmistakable, unanimous rejection (Mark 15:13; Luke 23:21). Over any other form of execution, they demand the prolonged shame and cruel torture of a Roman crucifixion. (Cf. Num. 25:4; Deut. 21:22f.; II Sam. 21:6; *Wars* VII,6,4.) However even a Jew had crucified Jews before (*Ant.* XIII,14,2; *Wars*, I,4,6). Such a sentence would resoundingly crush all suspicion that the Nazarene were Israel's Messiah. Hanging Him on a tree would leave Him under the stigma of being, not the Chosen of God, but the Cursed of God (Deut. 21:22f.; Gal. 3:13). "Christ crucified" would always be a scandal to unbelieving Israel (I Cor. 1:23). Further it would deflect all bitterness

over His death to the Romans and significantly defuse the possibility of a grass-roots uprising against Jewish leaders among His followers.

When truth is on the other side, yell louder

**27:23 And he said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out exceedingly, saying, Let him be crucified.** Two opposite views of Pilate's earnest protest are possible:

1. Unwilling to believe their unjust popular choice, Pilate stubbornly and quite unstrategically continued a verbal duel with a mob after it expressed its will. It would have been easier to tame a hurricane with a lullaby!
2. Pilate combines frankness and subtlety by openly implying Jesus innocence while learning whether the crowd really believes the position they have taken.

Either way, this question represents the third clear expression of Pilate's conviction of the groundlessness of their charges and that Jesus has done nothing deserving death. (a. Luke 23:4 = John 18:38. b. Luke 23:14f. c. Luke 23:22.) John registers two more attempts of Pilate to convince the Jews of Jesus' juridical innocence (John 19:4, 6).

Exasperated by this non-trial, Pilate tried another tack by scourging Jesus: the tender mercy of lashing a man half to death (Luke 23:22; John 19:1ff.; see notes on 27:26)! To appeal to their humanity, he brought out the pitiful Figure. But the well-oiled religious machine rolled over compassion and demanded Jesus' crucifixion. Again Pilate threw the case out of court (John 19:4, 6). "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him" (John 19:6).

Even this answer is attacked as having no historical truth, because the Jews, if they could carry out the death sentence, would have stoned Jesus (as the penalty for blasphemy) or they would have strangled Him (as penalty for false prophecy). Consequently, these protestations of Jesus' innocence on the part of Pilate are viewed as an artifice of the Evangelist to place the blame more firmly on the Jews. But the criticism itself is invalid, in that Pilate's language is spoken in his own idiom in terms of his own Roman penal code ("crucify him"). He talks like a Roman, not intending to express himself in harmony with the Jewish penal code (strangulation or stoning). Others see his words as simply ironic, since Pilate knew they had no right to crucify anyone.

The prefect finally determined to release Jesus, only to find himself blocked by blackmail: "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar" (John 19:12). Pilate should have answered that Jesus had convincingly proven that His kingdom in no way imperiled Caesar. However, no longer reasoning calmly, the governor began to react out of brute fear, because the Jews had touched a sensitive nerve in this time-serving petty politician.

John times this moment as 6:00 a.m. Friday morning of Passover week (John 19:14 = 6th hour from midnight, sometimes referred to as Roman time). Mark notes that Jesus was on the cross three hours later, at 9:00 a.m. (Mark 15:25 = 3rd hour reckoned according to Jewish time from 6:00 a.m.; cf. Mark 15:33 = Matt. 27:45 = Luke 23:44). This early hour was facilitated by the opening of Roman tribunals at daybreak (Westcott). Their time notices were estimated relatively, i.e. by the sun, not measured by Swiss watches or Roman buglers.

Pilate dramatically sat down on the judgment seat, brought Jesus out before the mob, and with obvious irony announced, "Here is your King" (John 19:13f.)! Suggesting that this victim of Roman justice is the only king the Jews are likely to have, his vengeful taunt only infuriated the mob. But, Pilate, like Caiaphas, uttered an unintended truth: this representative Man shall yet be shown to be the only true King of the people of God.

*But they cried out exceedingly, saying, Let him be crucified.* Despite Pilate's repeated efforts to be reasonable, the authorities have no intention of reasoning or letting others do so. To cover their lack of proof and verifiable arguments, they substitute the angry shouting of the death chant.

Perhaps stunned that Jesus had no friends, when every earlier indication suggested otherwise, Pilate countered, "Shall I crucify your king" (John 19:15)? This may not be sarcastic, because by calling Him "your king," he makes one final stab at the conscience of anyone who might rise to claim Him. But because it suited their purpose, *the chief priests* made a most self-degrading declaration, "We have no king but Caesar." This claim of loyalty to Caesar constitutes the definitive heresy of the official representatives of theocratic Israel: in their desperate bargaining, they surrender the fundamental truth that God is their true King. (Cf. Judg. 8:23; I Sam. 8:7; 12:12.) Whether they intend it or not, their claim denies their own faith and

irresponsibly cancels Israel's theocratic position under the immediate sovereignty of God and, consequently, its nationalistic hopes. Although God's kingship would be unfailingly present with the Davidic dynasty (cf. II Sam. 7:12-16), they publicly renounce the hope that another would arise to set up the Kingdom of the Messiah. Casting themselves on the loving kindness of Caesar rather than on God's covenant promise, they unwittingly sealed their destiny. In that generation the legions of their chosen king, Caesar, invaded Palestine to wipe out their Temple, their City and their nation (Luke 19:41ff.; 23:27ff.).

The pressures of the practical,  
the immediate, the tangible

**27:24 So when Pilate saw that he prevailed nothing, but rather that a tumult was arising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man; see ye to it.** This visual demonstration had a double value:

1. It returned crowd control back to Pilate. Their increasingly violent shouting had made it abundantly clear that he must act decisively to get the situation back under control. By this deliberate theatrical gesture, he got their attention. Curious, they stopped yelling.
2. Not only used among Gentiles, but also possibly part of Pilate's cultural awareness of Jewish practice, this ceremony was clear to the Jews in that it claimed innocence of a crime perpetrated by others (Deut. 21:6-9; II Sam. 3:28; Ps. 26:6; 73:13; cf. Acts 20:26). Pilate's solemn act did more than disclaim all responsibility for the judicial murder of their man, Jesus. It communicated to Israel not only his intention to exonerate his court but also the clear message that no tribunal would dare continue to demand sentence of death. In this thoroughly Jewish idiom he washed his hands of the case, not merely of the guilt of Jesus' crucifixion. Everyone should have dropped the question right there.

In reality, however, this unjust judge could not so easily exempt himself from real responsibility, because (1) no less than five times he had declared Jesus innocent. To permit this execution now is tantamount to murder. (2) Although it was the Jews alone who demanded Jesus' death, he was a magistrate! As representative of the constituted authority in Palestine with the power of life and death

at that time, he could not, on the basis of law and justice, turn Him over to them. *See ye to it* attempts to dump blame on others for acts that stain his own hands. (Cf. the rulers' disclaimer to Judas, 27:4.) The mistakes in his career plus the compromises on this day rose up to block his desire to save the most innocent victim of injustice in his career. He had sinned so long he could not now do right.

Here is written the moral paralysis of one supposedly powerful man. What brought about Pilate's surrender?

1. The emotion-driven mob is in an ugly mood. The governor had every reason to be nervous, because he had provoked bloody riots in similar circumstances during his administration. (Cf. Luke 13:1f.) His mission was to maintain the peace in the provinces, but he had already several unforgiven, unforgotten incidents on his record. With upwards of three million Jews in and around Jerusalem and only a cohort with which to maintain order, violence was Pilate's least defensible option. (Cf. *Wars II, XIV, 3; VI, 9, 3* for Passover crowd estimates in 65 and 70 A.D.)
2. When it finally surfaced, the real, root charge bewildered him: "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God" (John 19:7; Lev. 24:16). Since Roman authority was committed, wherever possible, to respect Jewish laws and traditions, Pilate was trapped between two legal codes, the Roman, which acquitted Jesus, and the Jewish, which would execute Him.
3. The rulers pressured Pilate by insinuating that they could ruin him politically by accusing him before a suspicious Tiberius for appearing to condone treason (John 19:12).
4. Mark uncovered another motivation, "wishing to satisfy the crowd . . ." (Mark 15:15). Political opportunism pure and simple.
5. Pilate jumped to the unwarranted conclusion that Jesus' popularity had evaporated. So why should anyone risk his own neck by throwing his weight behind a friendless wretch?

So, in Pilate's battle with his conscience, obedience lost out to expedience. Rather than risk his own political future, the now cowardly Pilate would sacrifice an innocent man. What is one Galilean more or less—especially if his own people are clamoring for his elimination? Little could any of them guess that this expedient not only temporarily saved people's lives by quenching a revolt in the making, but procured eternal salvation for all humanity!

Portentious words with  
far-reaching consequences

**27:25 And all the people answered and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.** In the mind of Matthew what sense or value would the expression, *all the people*, have? Does he mean to inculcate the entire Jewish nation, when, as is likely, only a small, probably hand-picked minority of the people were present in front of the Praetorium that morning? *All the people*, as a technical phrase, may refer to the normal method of judgment and execution among the Jews. Whereas the witnesses cast the first stones, the death of the condemned is accomplished "by the hand of *all the people*" (Lev. 20:2, 27: 24:14; Num. 15:35f.; Deut. 13:9; 17:7; 21:21). In the sense that this cry is instigated by Israel's highest authorities acting in their official capacity, it becomes tantamount to inculcating the whole nation.

They who had maneuvered so long to bring about His death could smell victory in the air at last. Nothing can stop them now, so they recklessly utter this fearful self-curse. *His blood be on us, and on our children.* *Blood on someone's head* means "guilt for the life and death" of either that person or someone else (II Sam. 1:16; 3:28f.; cf. 14:9; Jer. 51:35; Acts 18:6). Eagerly seizing Pilate's "it is your responsibility!" (v. 24), the authorities and their supporters welcome the fearful responsibility for Jesus' execution.

Was their proud death-wish realized? In reality, it became an unintended, self-fulfilling prophecy. It would be one more of the paradoxes of this awful history, that, having preferred a violent terrorist over the Son of God, they would be destroyed by violence (22:7; 23:34ff.; 24:15ff.; *Wars*). Witness the deposing, banishment, suicide and death of the protagonists, Annas, Caiaphas, Herod, Pilate. Others would be crucified sooner or later (*Wars* II,14,9; V,11,1). All those who did not submit to Jesus' Lordship suffered the terrible war. (Cf. 24:15ff.) *And on our children*: how long this awesome fate must hang over their descendants, God only knows, because only He could know their individual responsibility and attitude toward His Son. (Cf. Deut. 5:9; I Thess. 2:14ff.) Complete release from this terrible curse was offered all Israel from the very next Pentecost onward (Acts 2; 3:17-26). Each person evidenced his personal repudiation of the rulers' sentence by his own conversion to Jesus (Acts 2:40; 3:26; 5:31; Heb. 10:29).

And yet, this assumption of full responsibility for Jesus' death was only a hypocritical gambit to obtain an immediate objective, because,

the outraged priests accused the early Gospel preachers, "You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood" (Acts 5:28).

But the inclusion of this mob-rule outcry on the part of Matthew is not a Christian effort to heap undeserved guilt on Israel, for Matthew paints Pilate in dark colors too. (See on 27:26.) Who, except on the basis of mere assertion, can prove that this supposed "apologetic interest of Matthew" is his tardy, prejudicial rewriting of history rather than the product of objective reporting? Must his facts be doubted, solely because they lead to conclusions distasteful to modern critics who, in the name of ecumenicity and tolerance, seem determined at all cost to diminish Jewish responsibility for this execution? In the name of justice, modern Germans can exercise a mature self-criticism that rightly condemns their nation's Jewish holocausts. Is it asking too much that everyone, including the Jews and their modern apologists, rise to the same objectivity to recognize and rectify the judicial farce perpetrated against Jesus so long ago? Further, God's punishment of Israel does not preclude mercy and forgiveness to everyone who turns in penitent faith to Jesus, be he Jewish or Gentile. Certainly, the Holy Spirit could never intend this verse to justify racial hatred or anti-Semitism. But it will do no good toward racial understanding to attempt to rewrite the facts on this ugly page of history. They can only be admitted and forgiven.

So far from being an anti-Jewish diatribe, Matthew's testimony preaches that the only way the stain of blood-guiltiness can be taken from any of us is through the mercy of that One Jew the power of whose blood can cleanse us from all unrighteousness (20:28; 26:27).

### The unjustifiable sentence

**27:26 Then released he unto them Barabbas; but Jesus he scourged and delivered to be crucified.** So he collapsed, the tool of a race he despised, forced into a deed with which he had no sympathy. Is this gutless capitulation by Pilate a formal sentence? After Pilate's repeated protestations of Jesus' innocence (Luke 23:4; John 18:38; Luke 23:14f.; Matt. 27:23 = Mark 15:14 = Luke 23:22; John 19:4, 6; Matt. 27:24), it would seem juridically impossible that any death sentence could be given. Luke seems to affirm that "Pilate gave sentence that their demands should be granted" (Luke 23:24: *kai Pilátos epékrinen genésthai tò aítēma autôn*).

Even though *epikrino* can mean "decide, decree, choose, judge" (Rocci, 717), Arndt-Gingrich (294f) render Luke 23:24 "he decided that their demand should be granted."

This does not appear to be formal condemnation of Jesus on the basis of law, but merely the authorization required for crucifixion, extracted under duress. He only did what was necessary to get them off his back. Pilate's "frequent executions without preliminary sentencing" suggest that he might not have given formal sentence here either.

Symbolically, the prefect handed Him over to the priests (John 19:16) to the will of the people (Luke 23:25) but literally to the soldiers who did the will of the priests and people (27:27). *But Jesus he . . . delivered to be crucified (paradidomi)*. How many times Jesus was consigned to others: by Judas to the Sanhedrin, to Pilate and now to the soldiers! But none could have touched Him, had not God consigned Him to suffering and death (Isa. 53:4, 6, 10, 12).

*But Jesus he scourged and delivered to be crucified*. One must twist the facts to assert that the Gospel writers, living in a Roman world, tended more and more to excuse the Romans and incriminate the Jews with whom they had less to do. Although Pilate could and should have saved Jesus, it is an uncontestable fact that he, speaking for Caesar who spoke for the civilized world, sitting on a Roman tribunal and acting as a Roman judge, turned the uncondemnable Jesus over to Roman soldiers for a Roman-style execution.

But having *released unto them Barabbas*, Pilate must now take seriously the position of Jesus, whether he wanted to or not. He had played his last card and lost. His remaining choice is to *scourge and deliver [Jesus] to be crucified (tòn dè lesoūn fragellòsas parédoken hina staurothêi)*. Does this argue that the Romans *scoured Jesus twice*?

1. The participle (*phragellòsas*) could be translated as the ASV. However, because this rendering unnecessarily creates the impression that Jesus was scourged twice, it is better rendered, "having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified." Thus, Matthew and Mark merely summarize Jesus' tortures, rather than affirm that He was scourged again at this point, i.e. twice. (Cf. John 19:1-4.) Despite their postponing mention of the scourging until now, Matthew and Mark incidentally confirm John's account. Lenski (*Matthew*, 1097) argues that because Pilate's plan was to release Jesus after the mocking and scourging, it is less likely that these two events were repeated after the trial, but go together during it. He thinks John's sequence definitive and exclusive.

2. If it be thought that crucifixion is the paramount concern of the Jews, therefore, of Pilate, then perhaps care was taken not to exaggerate the scourging, lest the victim die under it before he could be crucified, then would not a second lashing in the same day be thought detrimental to this goal? Scourging intensified the poor wretch's suffering and hastened his death. On the other hand, Jesus' cross was carried by another: was He already too weakened to bear it Himself? Further, the prefect marvelled that Jesus died so quickly . . . (Mark 15:44).

*Jesus' he scourged.* A degrading punishment in itself, scourging, often if not always, preceded crucifixion. (Cf. *Wars* II,14,9; V,11,1; *Livy* xxxiii,36 cited by *I.S.B.E.*,2704.) Many died from this brutal torture inflicted by a whip made of leather thongs loaded with pieces of bone or metal. (Cf. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* IV,15,4.) The only worthwhile comment and explanation of this wholly unjustifiable act is Isaiah's: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (53:5).

Some view this scourging as reason for doubting the historicity of the account, because juridically absurd. In fact, despite one declaration of Jesus' innocence after another, Pilate ordered Jesus *scourged* and permitted his soldiers to torment Him?! (Luke 23:22; John 19:1-4!) If Jesus was innocent, why *scourge* Him? If guilty, why not crucify Him without hypocritically protesting His innocence?! Several reasons:

1. Scourging prior to the verdict even for innocent people was not at all thought irregular in that cruel era, being justified as part of the regular preliminary investigation to extract confessions or information (Acts 22:24; Eusebius, *loc. cit.*). Unsurprisingly, Pilate reiterated Jesus' innocence *after* the flagellation (John 19:4).
2. Jesus was not totally innocent: He had created what the rulers defined as disorders in Jewish society. For these, scourging would be judged an adequate penalty, from Pilate's point of view.
3. However, as the lesser of two evils Pilate unjustly subjected Jesus to a terrible scourging to bypass the worse death sentence, hoping that the crowd, moved to pity, would be content with this and allow His release (Luke 23:22; John 19:1-8). By presenting a battered, ridiculous clown-king, Pilate could argue the absurdity of thinking this contemptible dreamer able to foment the revolution with which they accused Him.

Neither understanding his Prisoner nor His accusers, Pilate could not have been more wrong: they would settle for nothing less than His death.

### ROMAN SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

27:27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium, and gathered unto him the whole band. Is this a second mocking, the first having taken place earlier at the time of the scourging (John 19:1-3)? Or, should this paragraph be considered parallel to that earlier event, i.e. only one mocking, taking place in connection with the scourging? One must not assume that evil men bent on mocking God's Son must stop, satisfied with only one session of ridicule! That Luke (23:11) reports the derision by Herod and his men does not exclude a renewal of this crude sport by Pilate's men.

To face His accusers Jesus had been brought out of *the Praetorium*. (Cf. John 18:28; 19:13.) Now they return inside the open courtyard (Mark 15:16: *aulês*; cf. 26:69). *The whole band* (*hòlen tén spefan*) would normally number 600 men. (See on 26:47.) Here, the expression presumably includes everyone not on duty elsewhere. The number would be large because it is more than likely that the detachment would be confined to their barracks during the Passover, ready for action but keeping a low profile to avoid unnecessary incidents. Naturally bored by confinement, they were ready for any diversion these circumstances afforded.

*What* these Romans did may not be as significant as *why* they did it. Because Jesus was a condemned "King of the Jews," however misunderstood His own position thereabouts, these pagan Romans (some think they were Syrians in the service of Rome) waste no time to show contempt for the subject people by ridiculing the Jews' Messianic expectations. (Cf. *Wars* II,12:1f.; Philo of Alexandria, *In Flaccum*, 36-39, recounted a similar mockery by the Greeks during a visit of King Agrippa to Alexandria. Later, after the ill-fated Bar-Cochbah uprising in 114-117 A.D., Romans in Egypt did a similar burlesque. Flusser, *Jesus*, 172.)

Further, although Jesus was condemned to death, did He have no rights? Could these soldiers do with Him as they pleased? Here is exposed the seamier side of Roman justice and crude barracks life among the glorious Roman troops. Were such activities encouraged by their superiors to keep morale high and the troops merciless and

hard? That Pilate tacitly approved is suggested by there being no evident punishment of its perpetrators and by his publicly presenting Jesus costumed by the soldiers. To make a buffoon of the object of Jewish hatred furthered his purpose too (John 19:5). He may have simply ordered his men to "show the Jews what sort of a king their Jesus was" (Lenski, *Matthew*, 1100).

### The Jewish clown-king ridiculed

**27:28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.** Was He a king? Let him be *stripped* of his peasant rags and robed worthily of his office! Was this Herod's gorgeous mantle (Luke 23:11), or, as is more likely, the common maroon-colored cloak of the soldier in imitation of the royal purple? On His bruised, bleeding back, anything would be rough.

**27:29 And they platted a crown of thorns and put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they kneeled down before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!** A thorny plant close at hand is rapidly twisted into a rude wreath. Whether it was their purpose to scoff or to wound him with the *thorns* is unimportant since, by weaving Him a wreath (*stéfanon*) of such *thorns*, they achieve both. Its leaves consciously imitated the laurel crown of the Emperor. The scepter *in his right hand* was but a *reed*. Who could guess that He would turn this *reed* into a rod of iron with which to rule the nations (Rev. 12:5; 19:15; Ps. 2:9)?

*They kneeled down before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!* Their sarcastic, pretended reverence for a crowned king is hardly aimed at Jesus personally about whom they may have known very little, much less personally hated. He is a thing, a symbol, not a real man before them. The rude mockery of these Romans aimed to degrade the Jews as a people for whom they had little love.

**27:30 And they spat upon him, and took the reed and smote him on the head.** As the time for His crucifixion drew near, the already rough game becomes more sadistic. The blows drive the crown of thorns further onto His head. Redemption is expensive! God's program, however, remained unchanged: Jesus must become Master *through* the caricature of His royalty which He endured (Heb. 5:8ff.).

**27:31 And when they had mocked him, they took off from him the robe, and put on him his garments, and led him away to crucify him.**

Did Jesus wear the crown of thorns to the cross? Although Pilate presented Jesus as a clown-king with robe and crown to the chief priests and officers (John 19:5), the purpose of the mocking is past. If *they took off from him the robe, and put on him his garments*, then the scarlet cloak and thorn-crown may have also been tossed aside, now useless.

What is to be done with Jesus Christ? Ever since Pilate asked it, everyone must confront this fateful question. Despite the falsity of political charges against Jesus, His message is far more political than the threatened armed revolution of the Zealots. Even if Christianity is no nationalistic rival to constituted authority, its uncompromising message of first loyalty to God and its impartial treatment of all men is far more radical and dangerous to the lords of this earth than that of small-time revolutionaries (18:1ff.; 20:25-28; Luke 22:25-27). It is an immature comprehension of the Christian message that fails to see how profoundly far-reaching Christ's demands are. This is not to foresee a City of God overtake the whole earth before Christ's return. It is to recognize how deeply all His claims on our allegiance and service reach into human society to transform it.

How many situations have we faced when, like Pilate, we should have defended Christ against a surging mob of unbelievers, and failed? Let us return in the grace of Christ, unashamedly determined to stand by Him no matter the cost. Let us dare to be the Christian our conscience demands. But poor Jesus took that mockery, because He loved us unto death and could foresee how it would break our hearts to see Him endure it.

These sufferings of Christ must awaken in us more than repugnance and indignation toward those who perpetrated them. Instead, they must stir in us a hatred toward those sins of our own that made this suffering necessary.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. From available sources prepare a file on Pilate.
2. Although Matthew does not state it, what must have been the charge brought before Pilate against Jesus? On what reasonable basis could Pilate have known to ask this?
3. Describe the political ramifications of each segment of this trial before Pilate, showing the pressure points involved.
4. Discuss: Pilate had as much political motive to crucify Jesus as

did the Jews themselves, and his attempts to save Jesus are a fabrication of the Gospel writers.

5. To what question did Jesus answer "Thou sayest"? What did He mean?
6. Explain how Jesus could confess to being a king, but Pilate would never consider it treason.
7. List the various efforts which Pilate made to release Jesus or to get out of condemning Him.
8. Was Pilate the first to remind the Jews of the political favor granted them of releasing a prisoner during the feast? How do you know?
9. When did Pilate's wife report her dream to Pilate? When did she have it? What was her testimony to Jesus' character?
10. Explain why Pilate's effort to trade Barabbas off for Jesus' release did not work.
11. Explain the people's expression: "His blood be on us and on our children."
12. When was Jesus scourged? Was He scourged more than once?
13. Where, when and how was He mocked by the soldiers? How many participated in this?
14. Give good reasons why Roman soldiers, who presumably would have no personal spite against Jesus, could be so cruel.
15. List every evidence of Jesus' moral stature as His trial before Pilate reveals this.

## SECTION 74

### JESUS IS CRUCIFIED AND BURIED

(Parallels: Mark 15:20-46; Luke 23:26-54; John 19:16-42)

#### DID MATTHEW FORGET THE PROPHECIES?

Anyone who has followed Matthew this far has encountered a formidable array of prophetic quotations that establish Jesus' divinely authenticated Messiahship. By contrast, Matthew now strangely omitted a number of prophetic fulfillments surrounding the crucifixion. Perhaps this is because this master writer knew that his Jewish readers would be so permeated with Psalm 22 that Jesus' Aramaic cry on the cross would, alone, be sufficient to suggest the details of the entire Psalm. (Could this have been Jesus' own purpose for shouting these specific words rather than something else?) Further, Isaiah's Servant of Jahveh may be discerned in every part of this entire section (Isa. 53). Simply to underscore every allusion of word of the Psalmist or

Prophet fulfilled in some phase of Jesus' crucifixion is to produce the startling effect of a well-underlined page.

Matthew's confidence, that the unshakeable certainty of his facts possessed persuasive didactic power, may have prompted him to tell them simply, letting their own eloquence speak convincingly to the Jewish heart. Thus, his readers' own conclusions about Jesus, the fine result of their personal reflections on God's Word, would be far more powerful than had Matthew spelled them all out. However, since the prophecies would be less well-known to the non-Jewish readers of other Gospel writers, these latter rightly cited them for their extremely significant didactic value.

## ON THE WAY TO GOLGOTHA

TEXT: 27:32-34

32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to go *with them*, that he might bear his cross.

33 And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, The place of a skull, 34 they gave him wine to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted it, he would not drink:

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think that Jesus carried His entire cross or merely the crossbeam?
- b. Why do you think the soldiers forced Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross? Had Simon done something wrong or did Jesus simply need this help?
- c. Do you think they suspected him of being a secret follower of Jesus and intended to make him share His humiliation?
- d. Why was Jesus crucified outside of town?
- e. Why, if Matthew is writing for Jews, did he feel it necessary to translate the term "Golgotha," which any of them could have understood without the translation? Did he simply copy from Mark, as some assert?
- f. Why did someone offer Jesus some wine to drink? Was this normal?
- g. Why do you think Jesus refused it?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

So the soldiers took Jesus along, leading Him out to crucify Him. He went out, carrying His own cross. As they were leaving the city, they happened upon a man named Simon. (He was a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus.) He was passing by on his way in from the country. The soldiers seized him and pressed him into service. They made him shoulder the cross to carry it behind Jesus.

Also following Him was a large number of people, including grief-stricken women who were wailing for Him. Jesus, however, turned to them to say, "Women of Jerusalem, do not cry for me. Weep, instead, for yourselves and for your children, because, remember, the time is coming when the wail will be, 'How fortunate are those women who never had any children, never gave birth to babies or nursed them!' That will be a time when people will begin to cry to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Hide us.' For if people do this when the wood is tender and green, what will happen when it is old and dry?"

Two other men, both criminals, were led away to be executed with Him. The soldiers brought Him to the place called "Skull-place." (In Aramaic it is called "Golgotha.") There He was offered wine drugged with myrrh, but, after tasting it, He refused to drink it.

## SUMMARY

Jesus carried His cross to the edge of Jerusalem where it became apparent He could bear it no more. The Romans impressed a Cyrenian, forcing him to carry it out to Calvary. Jesus' suffering excited the compassion of women but He refused it as misdirected. On Golgotha He also rejected a compassionate anesthetic. His humiliation was increased through "guilt by association," since He was to suffer with two criminals.

## NOTES

Shame converted to glory

27:32 **And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to go with them, that he might bear his cross.** Whether or not condemned men normally shouldered an entire cross—either already assembled or the unjoined beams—or merely

the horizontal cross-arm to the place of execution, John described Jesus as going "out bearing his own cross" (John 19:17; cf. 27:32; Luke 23:26). Jesus' attempt to bear His own cross gives character to His challenge that we take up our cross and follow Him (10:38; 16:24).

At the edge of Jerusalem, utterly exhausted from His trials and the pain of the scourging, He apparently collapsed under its weight, unable to continue. However, the soldiers' duty was to guard the condemned men against escape or liberation. Because they dare not expose themselves to attack by helping him, a substitute is required to carry Jesus' cross. Seeing Simon just then coming into town, the soldiers requisitioned his services to carry it, following Jesus to Calvary. (So, the Synoptics.) The impressment of Simon's help implies that his strength was needed to bear "the cross," not merely the upper crosspiece.

That *Simon* came from *Cyrene*, an important north African city, does not decide whether this Jew were a resident of the Jerusalem area to be distinguished from hundreds of other Simons by his city of origin, or one of the millions of Passover pilgrims who arrived from Jewish colonies around the Roman world. (Cf. Acts 2:10; 6:9; 11:20; 13:1; 1 Macc. 15:23; 2 Macc. 2:23; *Ant.* XIV,7,2; XVI,6,1.5; *Against Apion*, II,4.) He is later identified as the father of Alexander and Rufus, men apparently well-known to the early Church (Mark 15:21; Rom. 16:13?) That he was selected out of the crowd for so lowly a service does not prove him a slave, because the Romans would not bother about his social status but judge him on his strength to carry the cross to the place of execution. Impressment or requisition of anyone's service for certain limited service was the Roman right. (Cf. 5:41.)

But that he was "coming in from the country" does not prove (1) that he were a farmer who had been working in the fields that day, nor, consequently, (2) that the day in question were anything but Friday morning of Passover week, as if travelling were forbidden on regular feastsdays. To suppose him to be a farmer one must also see him as returning from field work about *nine o'clock a.m.* (Cf. Mark 15:25.) Perhaps out meditating in the glorious morning air of a country springtime, he was just returning for the hour of prayer at the temple.

The death march was composed of a centurion leading probably 12 soldiers divided into three details responsible for guarding the two malefactors and Jesus (Luke 23:32). Wending their way through the crowded streets of the city, they encounter a "great multitude of the people and of women"—probably not His followers—who, out

of well-meaning, motherly sympathy, raised a funeral lament for this popular young man so unjustly condemned to death (Luke 23:27ff.). A death wail of "the wailing women" was customary and would be taken up almost immediately upon death. (Cf. 9:23; Luke 8:52. See Matt. 11:17.) Ever grateful, compassionate and self-forgetful, the Lord paused to warn these unbelieving sentimentalists of their own future desperation when at the fall of Jerusalem, their sons would be massacred by wicked men and their own death would be preferable to their fear and wretchedness. (Cf. 24:19.) Despite the immediate atrocity He Himself must undergo, He could picture His own future as glorious (Heb. 12:2).

### The turning-point of world history

27:33 **And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, The place of a skull.** Mark's "they brought him" (Mark 15:22: *pherousin autòn*), suggests that, since Jesus' collapse required help in bearing the cross, the soldiers perhaps supported Him, half-carrying Him to *Golgotha* . . . *the place of a skull*. "Calvary" (*calvus*, "bald, scalp" *calvariae locus*) is simply a Latin word that translates the Greek, *krànion*. (Cf. Latin "cranium.") Matthew translates this Aramaic word, not for his Hebrew readers, but for those who read only Greek. (Cf. 27:46.)

Hebrew law and practice placed executions outside of the camp of Israel or its towns. (Cf. Lev. 24:14-23; Num. 15:35f.; Josh 7:24ff.[?]; I Kings 21:13; Acts 7:58.) Further, Jesus, who is to be the sin offering for the world, is also symbolized by offerings taken outside the camp of Israel (Exod. 29:14; Lev. 4:12, 21; 9:8-11; 16:10, 21f., 27; Num. 19:3, 9). Thus, also Jesus' final torment occurred "outside the gate" of Jerusalem, yet "near the city" apparently near a main road (Heb. 13:11f.; John 19:20; Matt. 27:39). The precise location of this *place of a skull* has been obscured by the following difficulties:

1. The macabre name would be derived, not from unclean skulls lying about (which would require the reading: *kraniòn* gen.pl. *tòpon*), but from some historic or topological reference:
  - a. its proximity to a cemetery of which nothing is stated in the text;
  - b. its regular use as a place for public executions, which is even less supported;
  - c. its shape bore free resemblance to a skull. Luke terms it simply "Skull" (*kranion*, not *kraniou tòpos*), as if this were sufficient to describe the place.

2. Its location may well be affected by the history of Jerusalem:
  - a. Around 44 A.D. Herod Agrippa initiated an ambitious project of urban expansion that may have enclosed *Golgotha* within the city about 14 years after Jesus died there (*Wars* V,4,2f.).
  - b. In 70 A.D. after a devastating siege, Jerusalem was virtually destroyed and sites around it were altered by the war itself.
  - c. After the ill-fated Bar Cochbah uprising, Hadrian rebuilt the already desolated city as Aelia Capitolina, a Roman city constructed on the ruins of the former Jewish capital.
  - d. Any site is affected by the location of the northern wall of Jerusalem in 30 A.D., an archeological puzzle not yet definitively settled.

The traditional site is covered by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. A more convincing candidate is a hill north of the Damascus Gate, which has two small caves that give the appearance of eye sockets of a skull without a jaw. Discovered by Otto Thenius, this site was popularized as Gordon's Calvary. The quite ancient, apparently unused rock-hewn tomb located in a garden at its base argues favorably for this site, although some date the tomb in the second century. Certainty that this location today resembles its appearance two thousand years ago is, however, lacking. That this tomb was apparently never used nor developed in successive ages is motive to ponder. . . .

27:34 **they gave him wine to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted it, he would not drink.** Charitable Jews and Romans both customarily gave condemned men a heavily drugged drink. The former aimed at deadening the pain. The latter were simply facilitating their work of crucifixion: it is easier to handle a drugged man (*Prov.* 31:6f.; cf. *Plin.* 20, 18; *Sen. Ep.* 83 cited by Farrar, 638).

Matthew says the wine was mixed with *gall*; Mark has "myrrhed wine (*esmurnisménon oínon*)" (*Mark* 15:23). Wine flavored with myrrh was known in the ancient world (Arndt-Gingrich, 766). Perhaps "myrrhed" connotes "spiced" without necessarily specifying "myrrh." So, Matthew indicates the particular drug involved as *gall*. But is *gall* (*cholês*) anesthetic? The LXX used *cholé* to translate Hebrew words for (1) gall; (2) poison; (3) wormwood. (See Arndt-Gingrich, 891.) However, in addition to bitter, poisonous substances, *gall* may have associated with it the idea of anesthetic, especially when the Hebrew word *rosh*, translated *gall*, referred, among other things, to poppy (*papaver somniferum*, *I.S.B.E.* 1167).

Or vice versa, *cholé* often translated *gall*, simply points generically or figuratively to any bitter substance (Lam. 3:15; Prov. 5:4; perhaps also Ps. 69:21), and the particular bitter element added to this wine was myrrh.

They kept trying to give Him the pain-deadener (Mark 15:23: *edidoun*). Jesus' refusal of this kindness had nothing to do with its bitter taste, as if the drink's bitterness were intended as an additional cruelty. Although His was not a stoic refusal to shield Himself from pain, some think that He was determined to experience death at its worst to make Himself like His brethren even in this respect (Heb. 2:9, 17). Others think He refused, that His sacrifice might be conscious. More simply, the price for keeping His mind clear until the last was having to endure pain as any other man. Even though the use of a powerful drug can be justified for others facing excruciating pain and natural death, His refusal illustrates what it means to be alert and on guard, so as not to enter into trials unaware of their insidious temptations and unprepared (26:41).

*When he had tasted it, he would not drink.* If He did not want any, why taste it? Did He not know what it was? He simply did not use His miraculous knowledge when a taste would supply Him the information. (Cf. notes on 21:19.)

Could a Jewish reader see an allusion to Psalm 69:21 in this?

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where according to Jewish law must executions occur?
2. Whom did the soldiers compel to carry Jesus' cross?
3. Where was he coming from at the time?
4. Explain why he was compelled to bear Jesus' cross: (a) what right did the Romans have to do this? (b) what need was there to find someone else to carry the cross? (c) how may this incident be harmonized with John's Gospel that affirms Jesus carried His own cross?
5. Define the terms: "Golgotha" and "Calvary." From what language does each word come? For what possible motive(s) was the area called this?
6. Locate the two more famous sites identified for the crucifixion. Explain why identifying the one true location is uncertain at best.
7. Explain the purpose of the wine mingled with gall.

## THE DEATH OF CHRIST

## Crucifixion and accusation

TEXT: 27:35-37

35 And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments among them, casting lots; 36 and they sat and watched him there. 37 And they set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why remove Jesus' clothes? Only to leave Him naked on the cross?
- b. Why would soldiers even want the second-hand clothing of a condemned man? Are not these pretty meager spoils?
- c. Do you think the soldiers were deliberately crass to roll dice for Jesus' clothes?
- d. Do you think David intended to prophesy the sufferings and death of Jesus in Psalm 22 or was he merely describing his own sufferings caused by his own enemies? On what basis do you answer as you do?
- e. What do the prophecies about Jesus' death tell us about its meaning?
- f. Why would Matthew, who cited so many fulfillments of prophecy in the life and ministry of Christ, suddenly abandon this method during the crucifixion scenes, when so many noteworthy fulfillments were available? Would not his readers appreciate his bringing them up?
- g. Why do you think Pilate formulated the accusation on the cross in precisely those words? Was he expressing his personal contempt toward Jesus or toward the Jews or both?
- h. How do you account for the differences between the Gospels as to the correct reading of the inscription on Jesus' cross? Did the sign say different things? Or did it say only one thing? Decide!
- i. Matthew hardly describes the act of crucifixion itself: the nails, the size and configuration of the cross, the ropes, the raising, etc. What does this suggest about his purpose or view of the matter?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

At Golgotha the soldiers crucified Jesus and, along with Him, the two criminals, one on His right hand and the other on His left. Jesus was in the center. He prayed, "Father, forgive these people, because they do not know what they are doing."

Pilate also prepared the written notice, indicating the charge against Him and had it put on the cross over His head. The title read: "THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS." Many Jews read this sign, since the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city of Jerusalem, and the sign was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. This is why the chief priests protested to Pilate, "You should not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This guy said, I am the King of the Jews.'"

"What I have written," Pilate answered, "is going to remain that way."

After nailing Jesus to the cross, the soldiers distributed His clothes in four parts, a share for each soldier, rolling dice for them to determine who should receive what. However, His tunic was seamless, woven all the way from the neck down. So they talked it over, "Rather than tear it, let us roll the dice for it to decide who will get it." This resulted in the fulfillment of Scripture, which says, "They divided my garments among them, and rolled dice for my clothes." This is exactly what the soldiers did.

It was about nine in the morning when they crucified Jesus. Then they sat down to guard Him there.

## SUMMARY

On the central cross between two criminals they crucified Jesus who prayed for the forgiveness of His tormentors. Pilate's statement of the charge irritated Jewish sentiment but remained the unchanged declaration of Jesus' Kingship. The platoon in charge of Jesus divided His personal clothing by rolling dice for it, then relaxed on the ground as they guarded Him.

## NOTES

... THEY HAVE PIERCED MY HANDS AND MY FEET.  
 I CAN COUNT ALL MY BONES:  
 PEOPLE STARE AND GLOAT OVER ME  
 THEY DIVIDE MY GARMENTS AMONG THEM  
 AND CAST LOTS FOR MY CLOTHING. (Ps. 22:16b-18)

**27:35 And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments among them, casting lots.** With great simplicity Matthew omits the ugly details of the crucifixion. But an understanding of his hideous form of capital punishment will explain the contempt and aversion early Christians faced as they preached "Christ crucified." (Cf. I Cor. 1:18ff.; Gal. 5:11.) Study these texts of Jesus' contemporary:

Illustrations of crucifixion: *Ant.* XI,1,3; 4,6; XX,6,2; *Wars* II,5,2; 12:6; 13:2

Crucifixion's brutality: *Ant.* XII,5,4; *Wars* I,4,6; V,11,1; II,14,9; VII,6,4

Crucifixion perpetrated by Jew against Jews: *Wars* I,4,6

Release from crucifixion: Josephus' *Life*, 75

Interest in the painful details is not totally dwarfed into insignificance by the moral issues that were resolved at Calvary, because (1) other Gospels record more of these details, and (2) the details themselves render far more vivid the cost of our salvation. This hideous death involved painful wounds, forced immobility, difficult breathing, exposure to the elements, insects, taunting by enemies, all contributing to a slow, agonizing death. However, in contrast to the commentaries, the spartan brevity of the Gospel writers turns the attention away from these physical tortures to the spiritual issues at stake here. Jesus' suffering was unique in that He who had known the closest possible comradeship with God must submit to the torments of the damned.

First they stripped Jesus of His clothes. Next came the actual nailing Him to the cross. This was done while it was yet lying on the ground. The belief that Jesus carried only the horizontal cross-member while the vertical pole awaited Him on Golgotha raises other questions: would Jews permit the upright poles of crosses, normally a Roman method of execution, to remain permanently erected so near the Holy City, near a public road? If so, how many? It is simpler to see that His entire cross was brought from the Praetorium. (See on 27:32; John 19:17.) Some anatomists believe that the nails were driven through His wrists rather than through the palms, because the body weight would have pulled against the nails and torn out away before long. But was the nailing of the hands to keep them in place or to support the body? A wooden support on which the crucified could sit seems to have been the only other relief (Alford, I,293; Farrar, *Life*, 639). Apparently Jesus' feet were not merely bound to the cross, but also nailed (Luke 24:39).

Then the cross was raised and dropped into a hole dug to receive the lower end of the upright timber. The height of the erected cross

needed to be only slightly taller than a man. Disputes about the form of the cross are futile, as the Romans would probably spend little effort to build this rude wooden device not intended for beauty or comfort but for disgrace and death. However, its form permitted the affixing of the accusation "above His head" (27:37). The fine, polished-wood beams of crosses today represent the reality about as unconvincingly as our lives reflect that of Him who died there.

He made intercession for  
the transgressors (Isa. 53:12)

No sooner had Jesus been nailed to the tree than He prayed His unforgettable Intercessory Prayer: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34; cf. Isa. 53:12). Here the soldiers first experience a direct, personal contact with Jesus' magnanimity. Not an outburst of fury against them but a pained prayer of pardon for them! His spirit found an excuse for this outrage perpetrated against God, not only by the soldiers who were simply following orders, but especially by those who turned Him over to them (John 19:11), and generally everyone whose sins put Him there. They did not dream that they were crucifying "the Lord of Glory" (I Cor. 2:8), "killing the Author of Life" (Acts 3:15-17) and "fulfilling the prophets (Acts 13:27). Because the Son's suffering was a crime against the majesty of God, He begged the Father to hold back His wrath, lest the divine purpose be compromised by an untimely rescue. If God were ever tempted to stomp the world out of existence and rescue His dear Son, this was the day! (Cf. Stephen's expression: Acts 7:60.) By His own readiness to forgive, He cleared His own heart of all vindictiveness. This was no blanket pardon that ignores each man's attitude toward God. Rather, because individual pardon is not given without personal repentance, His prayer is tantamount to asking God to give men a merciful opportunity to repent.

*They parted his garments among them, casting lots.* That Jesus was stripped completely is a shamefully real possibility. Nakedness would disgrace Him in His suffering. (Cf. Rev. 16:15.) However, Edersheim (*Life*, II, 584), believed that "every concession would be made to Jewish custom, and we may thankfully believe that on the Cross He was spared the indignity of exposure. Such would have been truly un-Jewish."

The *garments* of the condemned became the meager spoils of the four soldiers ordered out on this crucifixion detail. In Jesus' case the

royal garment and the crown of thorns were now gone (27:31). He had only His own five articles of clothing to divide among four soldiers. After His belt, sandals, cloak and head-gear, all of approximately the same value, had been distributed, one valuable article remained: Jesus' one-piece, continuously woven tunic (*chitôn*: "tunic, shirt"). Since this could not easily be divided without ruining it, the men decided that a decision of chance would determine its new owner. *Casting lots* is the normal way of obtaining something by a means completely out of human control (Luke 1:9; Acts 1:17, cf. v. 26; II Peter 1:1). By turning Jesus' garments over to new owners, they treat Him as a criminal as good as dead. However, shocking to the Psalmist or us, these soldiers' deed was but their normal practice, hence not intentionally malicious toward Jesus personally. In fact, the clothes of the two robbers were not unlikely distributed in the same manner. But even this crude bit of official business attended to by dice-rolling military men was foreseen in the divine purpose (Ps. 22:18). The prophecy's literal fulfillment is the more remarkable because it was executed by men totally unaware of its existence. Unintentionally, they too point to Jesus as the Man intended by the prophet.

Mark notes the hour of crucifixion as "the third hour when they crucified Him" (Mark 15:25), or nine o'clock a.m. as the Jews reckoned time.

**27:36 And they sat and watched him there.** Although this squad of soldiers can now relax somewhat, their purpose for being there was not only to attest to the death of the crucified but also to guard against any last-minute attempts to rescue any of the crucified (*watched - guarded, étéroun*). Perhaps even at this point when the physical exertion of the crucifixion was completed, they took a break for a drink and, as a crude joke, toasted the health of the King of the Jews, deriding Him (Luke 23:36f.).

#### Pilate's revenge

**27:37 And they set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.** Because the crucifixion was a public affair, its purpose was to discourage the spectators from crimes against the state. The crudely lettered *accusation* was borne to the cross either as a placard around the neck of the condemned or carried by one of the soldiers. Specifying the crime for which the condemned is executed, it drove home a grim warning to others who might be

tempted to make the mistake of committing a similar crime. This argues that accusations were probably nailed to the thieves' crosses too. To give the inscription the widest publicity possible, it was written in the common languages of the era, Greek, the universal tongue, Latin, the official language, and Aramaic, the local dialect.

There is no contradiction between the Gospels over the exact reading of the title's inscription, because

1. The basis of each version may be a free rendering by each author as he translated it out of Hebrew, Greek or Latin. Perhaps the title varied somewhat in each of the three languages. Should the Gospel writers be blamed for these variations?
2. Matthew calls it *his accusation written*; Luke, "an inscription" and John, a "title." Pilate's wording may have expressed the *accusation* even more fully than the composite of all the Gospel writers' summaries.
3. Even if each language repeated all the elements verbatim, our authors preserved the essential message unchanged in meaning. There is no contradiction where no author denies the wording of the others, and when each seeks only to quote the substance of the accusation without quarrelling over details given or omitted by the others. They simply do not tell all they know. Even with minor variations, the central message can correctly be recovered: "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

Since this ambiguously expressed title was dictated by Pilate himself, some see it as the ironic expression of the haughty prefect's cynicism. Certainly an *accusation* per se was no mere second thought by the wily Roman, especially if such titles were common practice. Pilate may have ordered it nailed to His cross to clear his record with Caesar, since the basic charge of blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God would not interest Roman jurisprudence. In theory, it named Jesus' crime. In reality, its wording gave Him a title. No crime whatsoever is indicated. Admittedly, Pilate was crucifying the Nazarene, but he nonetheless ennobled Him to the rank of king! He had cleverly transformed the *accusation* into a vindictive insult to those who had forced him to authorize the execution of this innocent man.

Because Jesus had interpreted for Pilate the true meaning of His claim, the latter comprehended the unpolitical nature of Jesus' Kingdom. Against this spiritual *King of the Jews* the charge of political insurrection remained unproven. So, the governor's inscription, which

unconditionally affirms His kingship, becomes Jesus' definitive clearing of the political charges. This *accusation* was Pilate's final protest of Jesus' innocence and, by reflection, his public exposure of the rulers' bitter jealousy. For Pilate to crucify Him with two malefactors does not negate this view, because this guilt by association is not intended by Pilate to humiliate Jesus, for He must die anyway, but to embitter the Jews in their moment of victory.

Although Pilate could not have intended it this way, the official title, *the King of the Jews*, when considered as a phrase in Matthew's Gospel, even if unexpectedly and subtly yet truly and profoundly reflects the divine purpose. How little they knew: He was not merely *King of the Jews*, but the Lord of the universe and King over all men (28:18; Rev. 17:14). Even so, He arose out of Israel and rules over all who become part of the true Israel of God (Rom. 9:5; Gal. 6:16). It is not improbable that Jewish readers of Matthew would notice the not insignificant coincidence that the *Gentile* wise-men asked, "Where is He that is born *king of the Jews*?" and the *Gentile* governor proclaimed: *THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS*. These two astonishing facts with which the amazing life of the Nazarene begin and conclude become unexpected signposts leading one to take the evidence for His identity seriously. Was Israel blind to its true *King*? (Cf. 27:54.)

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Describe the crucifixion, using all the facts available in the Gospels. How was Jesus crucified? Who actually did it? Who was with Him? Who were the spectators? Where did they stand or sit?
2. Describe the division of Jesus' garments among the soldiers.
3. What prophecy was fulfilled in the peculiar disposition made of Jesus' clothes?
4. Why did the soldiers sit down and watch Jesus? In what sense "watch" Him?
5. For what purpose was the sign attached to the cross?
6. Quote the inscription Pilate ordered attached to the cross above Jesus.

Reviling abuse and shame  
heaped upon Jesus

TEXT: 27:38-44

38 Then are there crucified with him two robbers, one on the right hand and one on the left. 39 And they that passed by railed on him,

wagging their heads, 40 and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself: if thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross. 41 In like manner also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said, 42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. He is the King of Israel; let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him. 43 He trusteth on God; let him deliver him now, if he desireth him: for he said, I am the Son of God. 44 And the robbers also that were crucified with him cast upon him the same reproach.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Men rightly marvel at the sad beauty of Jesus' last words on the cross. Study them and pause to reflect how few they are. Then think on the words that Jesus, hanging there in His pain-wracked body, did NOT say.
- b. Why do you think two robbers were executed with Him?
- c. Why do you suppose the robbers reviled Jesus too? Did they know Him? If not, what could they have possibly had against Him to justify their railing?
- d. How would you harmonize their reviling with Luke's report of the penitent robber?
- e. In what way was Jesus severely tempted on the cross? Was Satan there that day?
- f. Do you think that the crowds or their rulers would have really believed Jesus, if He had performed the supreme miracle of ripping out the nails and leaping down from the cross? Why do you say that?
- g. In what sense is it true that those who mocked Jesus were saying more truth than they knew? That is, in what way do they unintentionally glorify Jesus?
- h. In contrast to the political charges the authorities had leveled against Jesus before Pilate, what do these openly religious accusations spat out at Him at the crucifixion reveal about those who tried to crucify Him on purely political grounds?
- i. Is there any evidence in the scoffers' words that they had any misgivings about crucifying Jesus or that they had possibly made a tremendous mistake? Do you think they are putting up a bold front to keep their courage up and their doubts down?
- j. Since Jesus never once relented in His conviction that He was

- the Christ, what possible conclusions could His enemies have drawn about Him?
- k. Even if in quite another sense, we too are like the two robbers, *crucified with him* (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20). What is our commonest reaction to the shame, the scoffing and the pain that go with it? What should our reaction be?
  1. From Jesus' refusal to grant their demand by descending from the cross and their conclusions about it, what may be learned (1) about the program of God; (2) about the validity of human resentment when God denies man's requests?
  - m. From Jesus' silence in the presence of their demands, what may be learned about Him?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

They crucified two bandits with Him, one on His right and the other on His left. The people stood there, staring. Passers-by jeered at Him, shaking their heads and sneering, "Aha! You were the one who was going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days, were you? Save yourself! If you are God's Son, step down from the cross!"

Similarly, even the rulers, the chief priests with the theologians and elders, sneered at Him, commenting to one another, "He saved others, but he cannot even save himself? Let him save himself, if he is the Anointed of God, His Chosen One! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down from the cross now! If we could see him do that, we would believe in him! He trusts in God, does he? Let God rescue him now, that is, if He wants him! After all, he did say, 'I am God's Son.'"

The soldiers too made fun of Him, by coming up and offering Him a drink of their sour wine, saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" In fact, there was the inscription over Him, which read: "This is the King of the Jews."

Similarly, even the bandits that were crucified with Him also insulted Him. One of them hanging there, abused Him, "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us too while you're at it!"

But the other checked him, "Have you no fear of God at all?! Both you and He are facing death and judgment before God. But with us it is a question of common justice, since we are getting what we deserve for what we did. But this man has done nothing improper. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingly power."

"I solemnly assure you," Jesus answered, "you will be with me in Paradise this very day!"

Standing by Jesus' cross were four women: His mother and His maternal aunt, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw His mother there and His dearest disciple, John, nearby, He addressed His mother, "Lady, he is now to be your son." Then He said to the disciple, "She is now your mother." So from that time on, the disciple took her into her own care and keeping.

### SUMMARY

Passers-by, clergy, soldiers and fellow-sufferers alike taunted Jesus, daring Him to save Himself because of His claim to be the Messiah. Jesus remained silent until one of the bandits repented and asked to be part of Jesus' Kingdom. This request Jesus granted. Then He turned His mother over to John to care for.

### NOTES

He was numbered with  
the transgressors (Isa. 53:12)

27:38 **Then are there crucified with him two robbers, one on the right hand and one on the left.** After Jesus was crucified, His guards sat down to guard Him there (27:36). It would appear, therefore, that, although the *two robbers* were part of the procession from the Praetorium to Golgotha (Luke 23:32f.; John 19:18), they were crucified after Jesus (*Then, tôte*) by two other quaternions of soldiers, as if the raising of each cross required the combined strength of the men. However, it is probable that none of the soldiers rested until the crucifixion of all three was complete.

In the purpose of God Jesus was crucified between two sinners, *one on the right hand and one on the left*. Although men intended it quite otherwise, this providential arrangement pictures the true significance of the cross; our King Himself is the dividing line that separates the living from the dead, the sheep from the goats, the believing from the lost. (Cf. 25:33.) But He identified with us in our sins by dying among common sinners.

That these *robbers (leisti)* are not revolutionaries or insurrectionists like Barabbas (see on 27:16), but common bandits (cf. *Wars*, II, 12, 5; 13:2; 14, 1) is suggested by two considerations:

1. To preserve the calm against predictable violence, were a Jewish folk hero to be crucified by Roman power, they could never permit that two real patriots be executed with Jesus. (Cf. notes on 27:16-21.)
2. The self-incrimination of the repentant *robber* (Luke 23:41) is less understandable, if he considered crucifixion the just sentence for promoting a religio-patriotic revolution against Rome. Contrarily, if his own conscience condemned common banditry and highway robbery, his self-accusation makes better sense.

Luke's word, "criminals" (*kakourgoi*) apparently confirms this view (Luke 23:32f., 39). Therefore, to crucify Jesus between common criminals is to amplify His guilt by association, insinuating that He is no better than they.

All who see me mock me;  
they hurl insults, shaking their head  
(Ps. 22:7)

**27:39 And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads.** If the crosses were located near a main road for maximum publicity of this exemplary punishment, then *they that passed by* would be many. By this characteristic gesture of *wagging their heads* (cf. 109:25; Isa. 37:22; Jer. 18:16; Lam. 1:12; 2:15), they unintentionally fulfill prophecy (Ps. 22:6, 7). Milling around the cross and snarling at Him like so many wild animals, they show their inhumanity. (Cf. Ps. 22:12f., 16). *Railed on him* (*eblasphemoun auton*), from the Christian standpoint, means they insulted the deity of Christ. But, because they repudiate His claims as false, in their own view they are hurling the abuse that He justly deserved. Nevertheless, they are inexcusable, because His divine credentials were completely adequate to convince the good and honest among them.

**40 and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself: if thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross.** Because they misapply His cryptic "Temple prophecy" to the Jerusalem sanctuary, they presume that anyone who could replace that grand structure in just three days, could surely perform the smaller wonder of rescuing himself from a cross. Consequently, they wrongly interpret His inaction now as proof He had made exorbitant, unjustified claims.

But even as they poured ridicule on Him, by crucifying Him they were bringing about the true meaning of the very prophecy they

misinterpreted, for He spoke of the temple of His body. God would rebuild *it in three days*. Jesus Himself was God's true dwelling among His people. Although they repudiated *this* Temple by crucifying Jesus, God would raise up that Dwelling of God, of which the Jerusalem temple was but a dim, feeble symbol. But by crucifying Jesus, they guaranteed the Temple's desolation, since their rejection would bring God's wrath upon them in that one generation. Thus, they would themselves "destroy this temple [in Jerusalem]" but after three days Jesus would resurrect a far more glorious Temple, the true dwelling place of God in the Spirit!

In the person of these worldlings, their lord, Satan, is back and launching one attack after another (Luke 4:13). *If thou art the Son of God* echoes Satan's original seduction and repeated here for the same reasons (cf. 4:3; Luke 4:13). They, like him, know of only one style of Sonship, that of self-interest, personal rights and self-vindication. They argue that a true *Son of God* would never agonize on a cross!

In the Jewish accusation note the absence of the article. Even without it, His claim to be *the Son of God* (*huiòs toû theoû*) is one of the bitter bones of contention for which they crucified Jesus. (Cf. also 27:43; see notes on 26:63ff.) Yet they fully grasped His claim and crucified Him for it.

Apparently the presence or absence of the definite article made no significant theological difference for the Jews. (Cf. 26:40, 43; John 19:7 without article; however, 26:63; Mark 14:61 and Luke 22:70f. have the definite article.) They crucified Jesus for claiming to be *huiòs theoû* or *ho huiòs toû theoû*. This animus had begun early (John 5:18). They understood the meaning of His words and repudiated it, but their understanding should be definitive enough for Christian theology too: He claimed to be, not a son of a god, but *the Son of God*. (Cf. Luke 1:35 in Greek.) Moreover, titles or names are definite whether or not they have the article (here: *huiòs theoû*). This grammatical understanding of the article also affects the centurion's view, as he heard the Jews use these terms.

**MANY BULLS SURROUND ME;**

**STRONG BULLS OR BASHAN ENCIRCLE ME.**

**ROARING LIONS TEARING THEIR PREY**

**OPEN THEIR MOUTHS WIDE AGAINST ME. (Ps. 22:12f.)**

27:41 In like manner also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said. Abandoning the dignity of their age and office, the revered leaders of Israel lower themselves to show their contempt *in like manner*, i.e. like uncultured, undisciplined passers-by. The unsanctified fellowship of the nation's leaders appeared at Golgotha in person, their old, common fear now replaced with common childish glee and wisecracking. Perhaps they had originally intended not to attend the crucifixion, but when the offending title on the cross came to their attention and no appeals to Pilate could get it corrected, they determined to counteract its forceful influence by discrediting Him personally. To sway the impressionable crowds even then milling around Golgotha, they could transform the Nazarene's death into even more effective propaganda against Him and His movement.

FOR THE TRANSGRESSION OF MY PEOPLE  
HE WAS STRICKEN . . . (Isa. 53:8)

27:42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. He is the King of Israel; let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him. They triumph over their former fears that He would use His undeniably miraculous power to save Himself. They can afford to do it now because He is so obviously helpless to do so just when He needed it most for Himself. They admit that *He saved others*? They objectively admit nothing. Just as they do not believe that *He is the King of Israel*, so they debate this proposition too: "*He saved others*? Everyone talks about how *He saved others* from the common trials of life, from various sicknesses and even from death. The truth of these tales would be instantly and most certainly verified, if this miracle-worker could free Himself from His own woes!" Although intellectually unable to account for the source of His power, they treat His miracles as spurious, judging everything in the light of His present failure to perform in this supposedly critical, definitive test.

It is at this point that the chasmic distance between our Lord and all human demagogues is most noticeable; these authorities had attempted to save their institutions, their positions and themselves from the certain dissolution they see must result from Jesus' self-giving ministry (John 11:47-53). Nevertheless, by trying to save what they deemed the most important things in their lives, they lost them (16:24ff.). By sacrificing Himself, He won everything.

*He is the King of Israel:* the Messiah. He had tacitly accepted this title as royal authority was attributed to Him during the Triumphal entry. For maximum effect Jesus' detractors deliberately aired these popular views to show their groundlessness when applied to one who is now so obviously unable to realize all the glorious hopes predictable of a true *King of Israel*. *Let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him.* These hypocrites express their openness to become His disciples upon His immediate descent from the cross as the decisive, unmistakable credential they had always been asking for. (Cf. 12:38ff.; 16:1ff.; Mark 8:11f.; John 2:18; 6:30.) The power of this diabolical temptation lies in the self-assertive desire to perform His most telling miracle to date, which, in the estimation of sinful men, would shake these hypocrites like nothing else. But this is precisely the moment *not* to perform the self-vindicating miracle required. He must keep His mind on the true challenge: *Let him come out of the tomb alive and victorious and we will believe on him.* The true test of His identity is not their proposals, but the successful accomplishment of God's will!

**27:43 He trusteth on God; let him deliver him now; if he desireth him: for he said, I am the Son of God.** The enemies maliciously worded their blasphemous railing to call to mind Psalm 22:8, perhaps just to explode the false martyrdom of Jesus and disprove His claims. To the words of the Psalm they add the word, *now*, demanding that God instantly test the worth of Jesus' confident assertions by revealing their basis in some tangible way. They could safely apply Messianic prophecies to Him, since, in their view, He was indisputably incapable of fulfilling any Messianic texts like Psalm 22:8. It was the resurrection that would turn their own sword against them. The unhurried God could not be bullied into an untimely miracle that would compromise His eternal plan. Even so, the temptation is real: Jesus' personal confidence in the faithfulness of God is put to the supreme test. (Cf. Ps. 22:4f.; John 11:42.) This will give special poignance to His later cry of loneliness (27:46).

*I am the Son of God.* (See notes on 27:40; 26:63ff.) Their underlying argument is that God really cares about His true *Son* and would never leave Him to die, never subject Him to such an ignominious death as crucifixion. Jesus, however, is left to die. Therefore, He was not a true *Son of God*. Nevertheless, for good and sufficient reasons, God's mighty love made Him sacrifice this His only *Son* (John 3:16). Similarly, God's love for His saints does not always compel Him to deliver them from pain or death. Even their death can praise Him, as did the compelling example of Jesus.

The apparently unassailable logic of the Sanhedrists had as its special target the conviction of the masses who passed by. Their arguments would make sense to anyone who could be stampeded into deciding instantly before all the evidence was in. After all, if Jesus *could* not come down from the cross, or if God *would* not rescue Him, would not that prove Him an imposter?

**27:44 And the robbers also that were crucified with him cast upon him the same reproach.** *Robbers:* see note on 27:38. There is no evidence that these bandits simply shared the crowd's malice toward Jesus. They may have known little about Him. Perhaps they angrily blame Jesus because His crucifixion was the reason they were being executed sooner than expected. Although the two reproach Jesus, only the impenitent one blasphemed. (Matthew: *oneidizon*, "reproach, revile, heap insults upon," Arndt-Gingrich, 573; Luke: *eblasphémei*.)

There is no inconsistency with Luke's account of the penitent bandit. Matthew and Mark simply report how the two robbers began insulting him together. Luke does not assert that only one of them offended Jesus. Rather he tells that, when one of them did so, his fellow scolded him. Apparently, the marvelous conversion of the penitent robber began sometime during the three hours together with Jesus on the cross before the unnatural darkness. As time dragged by, the penitent's slow death forced him to reflect upon the state of his own soul, upon his own real guilt as opposed to Jesus' guiltlessness and upon His marvelous self-control during agonies that the dying thief understood only too well. (Cf. Luke 23:40f.) His reason calmed him. The other bandit, however, kept up his tirade, demanding: "Save yourself and us" (Luke 23:39)! Unrepentant, he wanted to escape his apparently sealed destiny and so incited Jesus to use His great, pretended powers to effect their release. The other bandit shamed him into silence by defending Jesus, "Both you and He must soon stand before God. He has no sin to answer for, but does not the threat of divine justice warn you not to aggravate your guilt by mocking your fellow-sufferer?"

This *robber's* lone voice raised in protest against Jesus' unjustifiable crucifixion is the only one recorded. No longer justifying himself, he cast in his lot with a King whose only visible throne was a rough-hewn tree like his own. It is not known what this *robber* knew previously about Jesus' mission and message. Nevertheless, while others remained unmoved even after Jesus arose from the dead, this man witnessed the King Himself being conquered by death and *still surrendered* his believing heart! No wonder that Jesus graciously assured

him far more than he asked, a place with Him that very day in the invisible world where only believers enjoy the presence of God! (Cf. Luke 23:46; II Cor. 12:2f.; Rev. 2:7.)

Peter's comment on Jesus' self-possession is most eloquent (I Peter 2:23f.). His silence is evidence of self-mastery and power over temptation. By His acceptance of whatever God's grace sent, He demonstrated total trust in God's provision (6:25ff.). In this most desperate situation He lived out His own doctrine of non-retaliation (5:38ff.). By this extremely convincing example He showed what it means to save one's life giving it away (16:24ff.). He did not respond to their cruel jibes, because it was a moral impossibility for Him to satisfy their demands and save a lost world too. He ignored their challenge because His mighty love and His will to save them held Him nailed to the cross.

But why should God remain shockingly silent and seemingly unperturbed, when, alone, His own dear Son was brutally tortured and killed by religious bigots who dared God to intervene? For those who have eyes to see it, He bared His patient heart fully as much by His refusal to interfere now as by His other revelations elsewhere. But the Father was not wholly absent or dispassionate. (Cf. 27:45, 51.) The living God sometimes appears silent and unfaithful to His promise to save, seeming to deny the rightness of the plan He Himself taught and the confidence of His children. But Jesus did not waiver. His death becomes an act of faith in the love of God, notwithstanding this seeming indifference of Heaven.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Describe the kind of "robbers" who were crucified with Jesus.
2. What was the prophecy fulfilled by His being crucified with them?
3. List all the various titles for Jesus mentioned in this section as these are hurled at Jesus to taunt Him. (You may include those reported by Mark and Luke too.)
4. What prophecy was fulfilled by the reproaches of the people?
5. List the various insulting statements by which the crowds taunted Jesus, explaining what they meant by them.
6. Explain what Jesus' refusal to accept the crowd's challenges proves about His true identity.

## DARKNESS AND DEJECTION

TEXT: 27:45-50

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? 47 And some of them that stood there, when they heard it, said, This man calleth Elijah. 48 And straightway one of them ran, took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. 49 And the rest said, Let be; let us see whether Elijah cometh to save him.

## THE SADDEST MOMENT IN HISTORY

50 And Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What do you think caused this great darkness? Why do you decide this way?
- b. How much territory do you think the darkness covered? How would you decide this?
- c. Do you see any relationship, on the one hand, between the darkness on the day Jesus died and His cry of abandonment by the Father, and, on the other hand, the outer darkness and separation from the presence of the Lord to be suffered by the damned? If so, what connection is there?
- d. What sacrifice was sacrificed every day at the ninth hour? Do you see any connection between this and Jesus' death?
- e. Why do you suppose Jesus cried out the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Did He just make up these words? Why would Jesus repeat them at this terrible moment?
- f. If Jesus were somehow deity, how could He cry out to God? If He were deity, is He merely talking to Himself? If He is a man talking to God, then is He not merely human? How do you solve this puzzle?
- g. Since Jesus spoke in Aramaic, someone shouted, "He calls for Elijah." On what rational basis could this confusion arise?
- h. Why did Jesus drink the wine offered Him now, when He had refused the wine mingled with gall earlier? What is the difference?
- i. When someone offered Jesus a drink, others tried to hinder him.

Why would anyone object to giving the thirsty man a drink on that occasion?

- j. Can we, who so placidly read the account of Jesus' crucifixion, really understand what that simple word "crucified" meant to Jesus who endured it?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

About noon an unnatural darkness similar to a solar eclipse came over the whole country and lasted until three o'clock in the afternoon. About three, Jesus shouted, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" (This means: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?")

Some of the bystanders who heard it commented, "Hey! this man is calling Elijah!"

After this, since Jesus knew that His task had now been completed, in order that the Scripture might receive complete fulfillment, He said, "I am thirsty."

Now there was a jug full of a diluted sour wine drink, so someone immediately ran to it, took a sponge and soaked it with the wine, put it on a hyssop stick and held it up to Jesus' mouth to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let's see if Elijah comes to save him!" whereupon the first man retorted, "Let me do this, let's see if Elijah is coming to take him down!"

When Jesus had drunk the sour drink, He gave a mighty shout, "It is finished! Father, I intrust my spirit into your hands!"

With these words He bowed His head, yielded up His spirit and breathed His last.

### SUMMARY

Three hours of darkness marked the last half of Jesus' crucifixion, at the end of which He quoted the appropriate words of Psalm 22:1. Here, too, His words were twisted into an appeal to Elijah. Thirsty, Jesus asked for a drink. They gave Him the cheap, soldier's beverage. Refreshed, He triumphantly announced the successful completion of His mission, calmly committed His soul to the Father and surrendered His life.

### NOTES

The darkest day in world history

27:45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. Jesus had now been on the cross almost three

hours, from roughly nine o'clock until noon when the ominous darkness began (Mark 15:25). Although Luke's language suggests a natural solar eclipse (Luke 23:44f.; *eklipōntos*), this is excluded by two physical factors:

1. Passover's usual full moon (Exod. 12:18; Lev. 23:5). Every Jewish month begins with a *new* moon. Passover occurs two weeks after the new moon, or at the time of a full moon. But a *full moon* demands a specific relation of the moon and sun to the earth whereby the moon can reflect the sun's light without obstruction. On the contrary, a solar eclipse is created by the moon's obstructing the sun's light. The relative positions of sun, moon and earth during an eclipse are more like their conjunction around the time of a new moon. Hence, a *natural* eclipse could only have occurred two weeks before this Passover when Jesus died.
2. Even though a solar eclipse may take four hours from the first moment that the moon begins to cover the sun until it reveals it completely again, the usual duration of a total eclipse lasts rarely longer than 9 *minutes*, hence far shorter than the three hours indicated by the Gospel writers for this unnatural darkness.

Because the sun could be darkened by ways other than by a natural eclipse, Luke's language, therefore, may be justified by supernatural power: God could easily have produced a strange darkening resembling an eclipse. God was not entirely absent; rather, by His withdrawing the world's light, He manifested His presence and concern. But evidence of His presence did not stop here (27:51ff.).

Did the *darkness* extend over the entire earth or only of some significant area of Judea or Palestine? The *cause* of the darkness determines its extent. Since the sun's light failed (Luke 23:45), it would normally affect all the earth's entire daylight hemisphere. Thus, it is clear that *all the land* (*pâsan tèn gên*) may well mean that more than just the entire region surrounding Jerusalem was enveloped in *darkness*. (Cf. Mark 15:33 = Luke 23:44.) Neither is impossible with God. But the former seems better supported.

What meaning should be given to this phenomenon?

1. Neither in prophecy nor in Jewish traditional expectations was the *darkness* a sign directly or specifically connected with the death of the Messiah (Edersheim, *Life*, II, 605).
2. It was not Nature protesting against the wickedness of Jesus' execution nor mourning His wretchedness. This view fails to explain

why Nature waited three hours to act. Further, it animistically gives personality to what are but elements in the natural world, the impersonal creative expressions of God's word. Even so, God could utilize these natural elements as a superhuman, audiovisual means to protest violently against the death of their Creator. (Cf. 27:51-53.) It is *as if* heaven and earth were in convulsion, mourning Him who created them. In the timing of these phenomena coincidental with the death of Christ, there is a hint that all creation depends on Him, for He sustains it by His mighty word and that earth's destiny ultimately rises or falls with Him (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17; II Peter 3:5-7).

3. In apocalyptic language the turning of the sun into darkness is a popular symbol for a radical change in world affairs, because these changes often involve great judgments of God (Isa. 5:30; 13:10; 50:3; 60:2; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:14f.; Amos 5:18, 20; 8:9f.; Rev. 6:12ff.; cf. II Peter 2:17). *Though these and such poetic allusions as Jeremiah 15:9 or Job 9:7 are not pertinent to the Messiah's death nor to be taken literally*, nevertheless, a people imbued with these concepts, by an association of ideas would be prone to think first of God's judgment as the ultimate cause of this literal effect in nature.
4. Did God screen the last tormented hours of His Son's life from the curious stares of jeering crowds? Was it also relief from the sun during its hottest brilliance?
5. Was this a miraculous heavenly sign Jesus' enemies had demanded? (Cf. Exod. 10:21ff.) Although this could have happened by natural causes, the marvelous coincidence with Jesus' suffering points to a supernatural origin. In context with the other-worldly events on that day (27:51-53), the darkness may have been only a prelude aiming to capture the attention of the most calloused, stirring them to reflection on the odd coincidence between the death of that Galilean Prophet and these signs from heaven. Who indeed was He for whom these portents speak?
6. Because Jesus' cry of abandonment came in close connection with the end of the darkness (27:45f.), the darkness is suggestive of the "outer darkness" and utter separation from the presence of the Lord to be suffered by those who do not let Jesus' suffering be the price of their redemption. (Cf. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; II Peter 2:17; Jude 13; II Thess. 1:9.)

Because the crowd seems to be considerably less vociferous at the end of the phenomenal black-out, the terror of the darkness must have quieted the bitter enthusiasm of a majority of the mockers. Mostly His friends and the soldiers remain. Luke 23:48 may mean that many simply did not dare leave in the darkness.

. . . Stricken, smitten by God and afflicted . . .  
(Isa. 53:4)

**27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?** The Lord had been hanging on the cross nearly six hours from midmorning until midafternoon, around three o'clock. (Cf. Mark 15:25, 33.)

Matthew quotes Jesus verbatim in Aramaic, then translated the meaning into Greek for his non-Aramaic readers. In what sense did God forsake Jesus? His choice of words, Psalm 22:1, is not coincidental, but intentional and highly revealing.

1. It can be validly argued that David simply prophesied Jesus' suffering on the cross; as does Lenski (*Matthew*, 1118): "For it is not due to the fact that David wrote this line that Christ made it his cry on the cross, but because Christ would thus cry out on the cross David wrote it as a prophet." However, other equally reverent views are also possible.
2. It is not the cry of personal guilt nor because God did not approve of Jesus' obedient life and ministry. Otherwise, why justify Him so completely by the convincing stamp of approval given in the resurrection?
3. Nor is this an abandonment of Jesus' humanity by His deity, the splitting of His divine-human personality. (Cf. Phil. 2:5-11.) His unique unity of mind, purpose and nature with the Father is not now interrupted (John 10:30). Only He who has fully experienced the comradeship of equality with God can know what it means to suffer its loss by being so completely forsaken by Him. Jesus does not sense a loss of part of Himself, but of the fellowship of *God*.
4. Rather, the source of this unaccustomed inaccessibility to the divine Throne lies in His very humanness, for it is as God's creature, as Man, that He cries out. (Cf. John 8:29.) Incarnation means He completely shared in our humanity (Heb. 2:14; 4:15). Is it a human cry crushed out of ANY GODLY MAN who struggles with

the torment over the injustice of his suffering, life and death, evil and good? Otherwise why express Himself in the precise words of the Psalmist's complaint (Ps. 22:1)? He really felt the intensely depressing loneliness all of us feel at such an hour, and this cry gives appropriate words to His pain. Jesus knew in that moment what we go through: He has been there (Heb. 5:7-9; I Peter 2:21)! But there is much more.

5. His cry reveals a psychological abandonment by God that was morally necessary to render Jesus' victory more glorious and meaningful to man. As *Man at His weakest*, stripped of any help unavailable to any other man, He defeated Satan and all he could hurl at Him in this last supreme effort (II Cor. 13:4; see notes on 4:2f.). All who are tempted must see that in Jesus of Nazareth God's adversary has been met and defeated by One who, though *deserted to die*, remained completely able to parry his every temptation with unconquerable determination and courage! By His having to undergo all the fury and hate of God's enemy as do we, He became the more amply qualified to be our Lord and Savior. But so much more conclusively He also condemned yielding to sin and wiped out every whining justification on the ground of the weakness of our human condition or that we feel abandoned by God to our fate. He has been there and won! His classic victory has shown us all how.
6. The awful accumulation of sin of the entire human race was being borne by Him who considered intolerable the slightest suggestion of sin. This takes us into the very essence of atonement. Far more than any other, THIS Man must feel the awesome loneliness and isolation of the sinner, not through any fault of His own, but because He deliberately chose to become the sin-bearer of the entire human race (Isa. 53:6; Matt. 20:28; Rom. 5:6ff.; II Cor. 5:15, 21; Gal. 2:20; 3:13; I Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10; I Peter 1:19). In this cry for the hearing of the whole human race of which He is the only completely voluntary member, He shouts the true meaning of unrepented sin and its consequences: a holy God cannot look upon evil (Hab. 1:13). Nothing could remove the sin Jesus bore, except His own death. His God-forsaken humanness gives real meaning to His sacrifice. Until this was completed, perhaps the Father was forced by His own character and love for Jesus to turn His gaze from His own dear Son. The only Man who deserved to live is facing the wrath of God, the curse and sentence of death,

the wages of sin. He underwent the ultimate horror of separation from God that we might not have to (Heb. 13:5)! He bore our curse and our burdens alone (Isa. 53:4-6, 10). His grief, pain, loneliness and desolation were real. And should He NOT cry out? Was this not the very definition of hell: to be segregated from the light of the Father's face, tormented by Satan's worst and responsible for the accumulated sin of all of Adam's race?

His cry, *My God*, expresses no conflict with the divine purpose, but a first-hand experience of the price demanded by His total cooperation with the divine plan. Even near the extreme limit of His strength and oppressed by His sense of being forsaken, His *My God* breathes the same unwavering confidence and obedient spirit of His earlier "Not my will but yours be done." He is determined not to surrender His godly trust. This *God* is not deity of others, but *His God*. Whatever theological impact His sense of abandonment by God has, His life ended like His suffering began, in prayer, "Father . . ." (Luke 23:34, 46), conscious of His communion with *God*. (Cf. John 16:32.)

For the sensitive Hebrew, this significant choice of words would communicate His application of the entire Psalm 22 to His own life situation. Hebrews entitled literary works by their opening line. Genesis is entitled *Bereshith* = "In the beginning . . ."; Exodus becomes *Veeleh shmoth*. "These are the names . . ."; Leviticus is *Vayyikra*, "And he called . . .", etc. Psalm 113 is called "Hallel" from its opening word. A dying Christian, unable to finish the phrase, "Nearer My God to Thee . . ." would communicate to those at his bedside that he was thinking of that great hymn. In a similar way, Jesus, whose whole soul was permeated with Scripture, may have been expressing Himself in the words of Psalm 22 precisely because of the appropriateness of the Psalmist's words to communicate His immediate situation. The attentive believer could discern how truly and completely Jesus was experiencing even the loneliness of abandonment by God Himself. And yet, in the presence of despair and tragedy, He shouted with poignant power to uncomprehending disciples everywhere that in God's Word lie power, hope and security. Man can live confident of every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, but he can also die that way!

Just as He withstood Satan's original temptations by unshaken dependence on God's Word, so He beat Satan down at the final challenge in the same way. If in the shadow of the cross, He sang the Scripture (26:30), should it be thought strange that this godly

Man should rivet His attention on the purpose of God by hurling at His own unrelieved pain and the injustice of His suffering the words of God expressed in this Psalm? Like Jesus' suffering, the Psalm begins in despondency and depression. But the final word sings of invincible faith in the glorious victory of God: ". . . dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nations" (Ps. 22:31)! To express the greatest moments of our lives is there any language like that of Scripture whereby we identify with something eternal, objective and grander than our poor feeble words can conceive? How much more so for the Son of God who thought those words first?!

This cry, according to Matthew's text, begins in Hebrew, *Eli*, and concludes in Aramaic, whereas Mark, according to the best manuscripts, reports Jesus' words all in Aramaic. (Cf. *A Testual Commentary*, 70,120.)

At the ninth hour every day the second daily sacrifice was offered in the Temple. (Cf. Acts 3:1; Num. 28:1-8; 29:6; I Chron. 16:40; II Chron. 2:4; 13:11; Ezra 3:3; 9:4f.; Ps. 141:2; Dan. 8:11-13; 9:21; 11:31; 12:11.)

27:47 **And some of them that stood there, when they heard it, said, This man calleth Elijah.** Who said this? Definitely Jews, because a Roman soldier could hardly be expected to know of the Jewish scribes' erroneous expectation that this undying prophet would return to earth (17:10; cf. II Kings 2:11; Mal. 4:5f.). Several motives for their reaction are possible:

1. Perhaps because His mouth and throat were dry, as shown by His later request for a drink, and His breathing difficult as His chest muscles strained, the hubbub and noise combined with the similar-sounding words to hinder many from hearing the words clearly.
2. Perhaps because the words are Aramaic, some Hellenistic Jew who understood little Hebrew or Aramaic could mistake the word "Eli" for a prayer to "Elijah" (*Elei*) not understanding the rest of the sentence. But the bilingual Jews present could have corrected the misconception based on mere linguistic error.
3. More likely it was the malicious irony of prejudice. What bilingual Aramaic-speaking Jew would have mistaken this citation of Psalm 22:1 for an invocation of the prophet Elijah? It is plausible that those who heard the original cry understood it all too well. But their unbelieving bias against Jesus made a crude pun of it by turning *Eli* into *Elias* thus devising but another form of heartless

ridicule. They had insisted that God save Him. Now, when God would not rescue Him, they ridicule as if Jesus had turned to Elijah. If Elijah was scheduled to come before the Messiah, Jesus Himself could not be the Messiah. By implication, He is ridiculed as appealing to the forerunner of the very Christ He claims to be (cf. 11:11, 14; 17:10-13).

My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth . . . (Ps. 22:15).

They gave me vinegar for my thirst (Ps. 69:21).

**27:48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.** This sentence of Matthew does not appear to fit the context of the preceding verse. What does the reaction of the man, who ran *straightway* to prepare Jesus a drink, have to do with His cry of abandonment (v. 46) or the conclusion that He was appealing to Elijah (v. 47)? John's account removes this obscurity: *straightway* after crying out His sense of abandonment. Jesus also said, "I thirst" (John 19:28f.).

The fact that *straightway one of them ran* sounds like instant military obedience to orders (from the centurion?). Crucifixion was normally an ordeal that lasted a day or two, depending on the endurance of its victims. Because terrible thirst also characterized this torture, that a *sponge* and vessel of *vinegar* were present argue that this was the normal way the soldiers *gave drink to* the executed. Drinking from a cup would be difficult for the crucified to manage, hence the other method: a *sponge filled with vinegar* fastened to a *reed*. The commonness of the method appears to argue, therefore, that giving Him a drink was not unusual but a normal kindness offered any dying man. John reported what kind of stick it was, i.e. hyssop. Since the crosses need not have been tall to accomplish their purpose, the soldiers could almost reach Him to give Him a drink (Luke 23:36). So, a short hyssop stick to reach the lips of the crucified.

As its name implies, the *vinegar* drink was sour (*oxos*) in taste. But the soldiers who brought it for their own lunch called it *posca*, the regular diluted sour wine of the military. "It relieved thirst more effectively than water and, because it was cheaper than regular wine, it was a favorite beverage of the lower ranks of society and of those in moderate circumstances" (Arndt-Gingrich, 577; cf. Ruth 2:14).

Although He had turned down drugged wine before. Jesus accepted this wine because of His severe thirst and since this wine was not anesthetic. Instead, it gave Him the needed clarity of mind and voice for the last effort of His life. Just as Jesus would not begin His suffering drugged by myrrhed wine, so now He would not leave it so weak He could not talk. He would go out with power. The drink provided the energy for what He must do next.

Could a Hebrew reader miss the connection between this and Psalm 22:15 or 69:21?

**27:49** *And the rest said, Let be; let us see whether Elijah cometh to save him.* Despite the uncanny midday darkness just concluding, these skeptics continue to scoff at the possibility of a spectacular intervention of the supernatural to rescue Jesus ("to take him down" from the cross, Mark 15:36).

**27:50** *And Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit.* *Again* (= 27:46) The drink cleared His throat and refreshed Him sufficiently so that, summoning what remained of His dying energy and with a voice still strong with life, He could shout triumphantly the victory cry of the completed mission: "It is finished" (John 19:30)! Who would NOT shout, if He was sure his entire life work on earth was perfectly completed, the aim and purpose of Scriptures fulfilled, the redemption of man realized and God's will done?!

Articulate to the very last, He appropriately *yielded up his spirit* in the unshaken confidence and prayer of a loyal Son in full, familiar fellowship with God, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46; cf. Ps. 31:5)! He lay down His life calmly, without reluctance, sure.

That He *yielded up his spirit* is fact, but what this means our limited experience of death may not permit us to know.

1. It seems to be a quibble to say that none of the Gospel writers say, "He died," but used, rather, the euphemism, *He yielded up his spirit* (*apheken to pneōma*) whereby Jesus' death *per se* is thought to be His own voluntary act. However, when the identical idiom is used to describe the death of other people, would it mean they too laid down their lives, i.e. died as an act of their will (LXX of Gen. 35:18; 1 Esdras 4:21; cf. Acts 7:59)? Further, the Epistles do not consider "He died" a misleading expression, but utilize it almost exclusively. Consequently, it is questionable whether the Gospel writers intended that this euphemism bear the theological sense of "He caused Himself to die."

2. The question is complicated by the fact that this expression may be no more than an apt euphemism for "He expired" or "He breathed His last" (*exépneusen*, Mark 15:37 = Luke 23:46). Does this expression mean that death was taking charge of His body, so He committed Himself, i.e. His personality, His mind, will, emotions, conscience and imagination, to God? (Cf. I Peter 4:19.)

It would seem, therefore, that this prayer alone, not His death itself, was His own deliberate act. It is His prayer which expresses in what sense He *yielded up his spirit* when He simply surrendered His life, His real self, back to God the Giver. (Cf. Acts 7:59; Eccl. 12:7.) It cannot mean that, unwilling to wait until natural causes took their course, He willed Himself to die in a self-chosen moment by a death *bordering on suicide*. Although these supernatural options were potentially available for the unique Son of God, His experience of death would be less like our own, if He saved Himself from a prolonged natural death, unless we could do the same. His laying down His life to take it up again refers not merely or specifically to this instant of death,—although, of course, it includes it—but, rather, to that absolute freedom of choice whereby He submitted voluntarily to His entire passion. (Cf. John 10:17f.; 19:30.) To think that Jesus died of natural causes does not detract from the grandeur or voluntary character of His death, because the Son of God could have foreseen these natural causes and prepared for them in harmony with every phase of His atonement. So, although the moral and juridical results of His death are vastly different from ours, the Scriptures do not describe its cause on any basis other than its physical similarity to ours. (Cf. Heb. 2:9-17; 5:7ff.)

Jesus died after only a few hours on the cross. Pilate was surprised that He were already dead, since, as implied by the Jews' request for the summary execution of those crucified (John 19:31), sometimes several days passed before death overtook the crucified. Therefore, Jesus' relatively rapid death may be attributed principally to the terrible scourging from which many men died before getting to the cross. Exhaustion played an important part, because, if Jesus' discomfort on the cross was augmented by His inability to breathe except by repositioning His body, His ability to do this was limited to His physical strength already weakened by scourging, hunger and fatigue, ending in suffocation. It is certain that the spear would and did not kill Him, because when that happened, He had already died (John 19:33f.). Some suggest that heart failure or rupture would

explain both His death and the issuing of blood and water. However, medical authorities are not agreed on the exact cause of His death. The fact that He died is authenticated by His executioners, so we need not go further. To investigate the physical cause is a matter of medical interest, not a dogma of faith.

Do the poetic expressions of Psalm 22:14 and 69:20 help define the solution? Other expressions from these Psalms are taken literally, why not these? Perhaps only in the sense that what was true of the Psalmist could be infinitely more appropriate of the Christ. The Psalmist spoke more truth than he understood. (Cf. I Peter 1:10ff.; Luke 10:24.) Even so, such exegesis involves a figurative application to the Psalmist, but literal one to Christ. The bare, literal fulfillment is not all that God wants man to see. In this sense it is not shallow sentimentalism to think that "Jesus died of a broken heart," because the literal fact points to the higher reality: it hurt Him deeply to bear the guilt and penalties of our sin! Our sinfulness killed Him. Beyond His chosen mortality, is it impossible that the psychological burden He bore literally crushed the life out of Him? Until we understand the psychosomatic equation of our own being, we shall not begin to be able to analyze what happened when Jesus died. Here is where analysis must give way to humble gratitude and worship.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. At what hour did the unusual darkness occur? How long did it last?
2. What is the only saying of Jesus quoted by Matthew verbatim?
3. What did Jesus mean to communicate by this? To whom was it addressed?
4. What, if anything, does Psalm 22 have to do with the crucifixion? Give details.
5. How did someone give Jesus a drink?
6. What did they offer Him to drink? Why offer Him this?
7. What objection was made to this kindness and why? What is the meaning of "Let be"?
8. About what time did Jesus die?
9. Explain what is meant by "He yielded up His spirit."
10. What sacrifice was killed at the Temple at the ninth hour? What else occurred normally at that same time in the Temple?

## MIRACLES ACCOMPANYING THE DEATH OF CHRIST

TEXT: 27:51-53

51 And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake; and the rocks were rent; 52 and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered into the holy city and appeared unto many.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why attribute to God what an earthquake may have actually done, i.e. the ripping of that veil? What causes earthquakes anyway? What happened that day anyway?
- b. Assuming that the veil of the temple was miraculously torn "from the top to the bottom," what do you suppose was the purpose of God for this gesture?
- c. What kind of impression do you think the rending of this great curtain must have made on the priests, not to mention the one who might have been burning incense before it at the hour of prayer? (Cf. 27:46 with Acts 3:1; Luke 1:9f.)
- d. Since the veil of the temple was visible to none but priests who could have witnessed it, would priests be likely to tell the story of the end of that from which they derived their livelihood? If so, excluding inspiration for the moment, how could this great secret still leak out and be recorded by Matthew?
- e. What divine purpose do you discern in the opening of the tombs and the resurrection of the saints after Jesus' own resurrection?
- f. Who do you think these saints were?
- g. What became of them after their resurrection? Did they have to die all over again? Where did they go?

### PARAPHRASE

At this point the great veil in the sanctuary split in two from top to bottom. There was an earth tremor and boulders cracked. Even tombs were opened. The bodies of many holy people who had died were resurrected to life. They left their tombs after Jesus arose from the dead and went into the Holy City and appeared to many people.

## SUMMARY

Miracles accompanied the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus: the great Temple curtain that veiled the Most Holy Place was ripped in two from the top by unseen hands! An earthquake split great rocks. Many saintly people who had died were resurrected and after Jesus' resurrection made their appearance in Jerusalem before many witnesses.

## NOTES

**27:51 And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake; and the rocks were rent.** The heavy *veil* in question was located in the sanctuary to curtain off the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Exod. 26:31ff.; 36:35; II Chron. 3:14; Heb. 9:2f.; see also *Wars*, V, 54f.). In the tabernacle first, then in the temple, it served to distinguish the area of the common priests from the symbolic dwelling place of God. So long as this great veil remained intact, the atonement of man's sin was possible only through intercession by sinful high priests and imperfect sacrifices, on the Day of Atonement. Access to the glory of God and the fellowship with Him through prayer were barred by this veil too. (Cf. Heb. 6:19.) Incense and prayer were offered outside it. (Cf. Acts 3:1; Luke 1:8-21.) Jewish tradition (*Mid.* 4,7; *I.S.B.E.*, 2938) declares the *veil* consisted of two exceedingly heavy draperies about 50 cm. apart. For this to be *rent in two from the top to the bottom* would be little short of a mighty miracle.

So, when the great veil came ripping in two and fell apart, the Holy of Holies lay exposed. However, since great golden doors stood behind the veil (I Kings 6:31f.; *Wars*, V, 5,4f.), the priests could not yet gaze with impunity into that dark, bare room. The ark of the covenant had been gone for centuries. Where once the Glory of Israel spoke to His people from between the cherubim, there was now nothing (*Wars*, V, 5,5; *Mish.*, *Yom.* 5,2). Until that great *veil* was replaced, the priests could verify that one more symbol of the great separation between man and God broke down seemingly of its own accord. Ever more clearly "Ichabod" was being engraved upon the Temple; its glory was at last departing never to return. Pagans had gazed upon the emptiness of the Holy of Holies before (*Ant.* XIV,4,4; *Wars*, I,7,6; cf. VI,4,7 also *Ant.* XII,5,4?). Now, however, the Temple's obsolescence is being dramatically revealed to men just at

the hour that the Nazarene, Jesus of Nazareth, expired. Matthew's Gospel practically shouts to those who knew the facts best, "Priests of God and men of Israel, is there any connection between these events?"

The ominous rending of this massive curtain, particularly *from the top to the bottom* at the moment of Jesus' death, would suggest that God Himself opened the way for man to enter boldly into His presence and He did it through the perfectly atoning sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 6:19f.; 9:8, 11, 12, 24ff.; 10:19ff.) Further, this great *veil was rent* at the afternoon hour of prayer near the ninth hour when the officiating priest was in the process of offering incense at the incense altar located just in front of the *veil*. (Cf. Acts 3:1; Luke 1:8-21.) The last daily sacrifice of the Old Covenant, whereby Israel consecrated itself daily to the Lord, was being sacrificed that afternoon. Unexpectedly, the old, symbolic ministry of the entire Levitical system, having fulfilled its purpose, came to the end of its usefulness, finding its perfect completion in Jesus. Godet (*P.H.C.* XXIV, 596) wrote:

As the high priest rent his robe in the presence of a great scandal, so God rent the veil which covers the Holy of Holies, where formerly He had manifested Himself. It implied a desecration of the most holy place, and consequently of the Temple, with its courts and altar and sacrifices. The Temple is profaned, abolished by God Himself. The efficacy of sacrifice has henceforth passed to another blood, another altar, and a new order of priesthood.

This event has tremendous significance for understanding millennial questions. Shall the Jerusalem Temple be rebuilt here on earth and its worship restored? By ripping apart that mighty *veil*, God proclaimed the end of that typical ministry because of the arrival of a superior ministry that was perfect and final, when Jesus our divine High Priest entered *once for all forever* into the true Holy of Holies, the presence of God, to intercede with his own blood for us. *The veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom*. What God has rent asunder, let not man join together!

Even without special revelation Matthew could have learned of rending of the great veil from a "great many of the priests who were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). Indeed, could their conversation be explained by their insight into the meaning of this very sign?

*The rocks were rent not improbably as a result of the earthquake.*

1. In this *earthquake* some discern a symbol of the shaking that began with the death of Christ, a shaking of all that is impermanent or contrary to the Government of God in the moral world until only that which is eternal shall remain. (Cf. Hag. 2:6f.; Heb. 12:26f.)
2. Beginning from the starting point of literal *earthquakes* unquestionably caused by the Lord, it was possible for Jewish poets and prophets to develop poetic imagery based on fearful convulsions in nature whereby the covenant God of Israel revealed His majesty, might and holy wrath against sinners (Exod. 19:19; Ps. 68:8; 114:4-8; II Sam. 22:8; Ps. 18:7; 77:18; Isa. 5:25; 13:13; 24:18f.; 29:6; Jer. 10:10; 49:21; Joel 2:10f.; Nah. 1:5f.; Hag. 2:6; cf. Acts 4:31; 16:26; Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13; 16:18). Thus, for people prepared in this way by their literary heritage, it would be a short mental step from God the cause of the literal to His moral reasons for doing it.

Because Matthew points out that the Romans discerned the connection between "the earthquake and the things that were happening" (27:54: *idòntes tôn seismón kai tà ginòmena*) and the fact that they reacted positively to what they saw, it would appear that *anyone* should be able to see a significant connection between these natural phenomena and Jesus' death. Although earth's natural course regularly continues without interruption when other mortals suffer, here, however, it is brusquely interrupted just at the moment of THIS MAN'S death, and becomes one more portent that points to His world-shaking significance.

**27:52 and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered into the holy city and appeared unto many.** Since many *tombs* were carved into the stone face of cliffs, even the opening of the tombs could be produced by the tremor as the rocks were rent. But here its effect stops. Other power is required to give life to the dead.

The fact that the saints are raised, not at the time their tombs are opened, but *after his resurrection* implies that their own resurrection is a result of His and dependent upon it. Death has been self-defeated by the death of our Lord. Life was not merely guaranteed for others but actually produced by His own resurrection. These resurrected saints become an earnest of what shall occur when Phase II of Jesus' earthly victory shall occur at His Second Coming.

A simple reading of the text argues that they arose when He died, hence before He arose.

1. But, if they rose first, they unquestionably remained in their graves until *after his resurrection*, since *coming forth out of the tombs* is connected with *entering into the holy city*. But even if they arose first, like Lazarus and many others, Christ remains the first-born from the dead, the first-fruits of them that slept (I Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18). He alone is the first to rise by His own power to die no more and guarantee life for all men by the power of His own immortality. These *saints* were raised only by virtue of His death and resurrection. In this sense His uniqueness is not affected by the hypothesis of their prior resurrection.
2. A better view, better supported by the grammar, is to see the words as constituting one complex idea: "they arose and, coming out of the graves after His resurrection, entered" (*egérthesan kai exelthōntes . . . metὰ tèn égersin autoŭ eisêlthon*). The resurrections and appearances in Jerusalem all occurred after Jesus arose.

Lenski (*Matthew*; 1130) and Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 976) argue that only their entrance into the holy city occurred after Jesus' resurrection, whereas "they left their tombs at the moment of Christ's death." But to connect *after his resurrection* with their entrance into the holy city ungrammatically divides a participle (*exelthōntes*) from its main (*eisêlthon*) and links it with a verb from which it is separated by *and* (*kai*).

The solution to the problem of when they arose is perhaps only literary in character, in that Matthew summarized the effects of Christ's death in one place and proceeded to report the resurrection and Great Commission together without returning to report the *saints'* resurrection in its chronological order. This is accepted literary style well documented in Scripture, but gives rise to the debate.

*They appeared unto many*: who are the *many*? Believers? Enemies? Since Jesus Himself appeared only to preselected believers (Acts 10:40f.), perhaps these saints were sent to appear to His enemies. Their appearance in *the holy city*, Jerusalem (4:5; cf. Isa. 48:2; 52:1), points to the directness and power of the evidence. Here, the nation of Israel was gathered for the Passover. Thus, critics at the very heart of Judaism could easily examine the facts: "The amazing resurrections occurred after the Galilean from Nazareth was crucified! Could

there be any connection?" Would not this proof that God had visited His people serve to prepare minds for the Gospel of a risen Christ preached just over a month later?

What happened to these resurrected *saints* after their appearances during the post-resurrection period is not stated. Their spectacular resurrection was incomparably surpassed by the world-shaking tidings that are the heart of the Gospel: Christ Jesus arose! Possibly they eventually joined Jesus for the ascension. (Cf. Eph. 4:8a [= Ps. 68:18]: "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives. . . ." Were these resurrected saints His "captives" to embellish His triumphant return to glory?)

God had neither totally abandoned Jesus nor absented Himself from the crucifixion, merely because He did not intervene to save His Son. He too was there. These miraculous events could not occur unless God had cared enough to intervene in this way. These supernatural acts say, "Notice, I am here!"

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What unusual events accompanied the *death* of Jesus?
2. Locate the veil of the temple, indicating its function there.
3. At what hour was this great curtain torn?
4. What other events usually occur at that same period in the Temple?
5. When, precisely, did the resurrections cited occur?
6. What unusual events occurred after Jesus' *resurrection*?

### THE WITNESS

TEXT: 27:54-56

54 Now the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. 55 And many women were there beholding from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: 56 among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. List every fact in the entire crucifixion to which the centurion and his men were witnesses, that could have contributed to convince them of Jesus' true identity.
- b. When so many other people were present from whom one would more likely expect such a grand confession of Jesus' identity, does it not appear a bit suspicious that it was actually the despised Gentiles who confessed Him? Does it make sense to you that the confessors should be uncultured Roman soldiers, rather than men of thought and culture trained in righteousness by the Mosaic Law?
- c. Why do you think so many women were present?
- d. What fact would explain why Mary, Jesus' mother, is not named in Matthew's list, whereas John affirmed that she was definitely at the cross, and Jesus addressed her directly?
- e. Can you explain why Jesus' friends would remain at a distance? Would there have been more than one reason? If so, what were they?
- f. John affirms that the women named stood close to the cross, whereas the Synoptics all describe them as "looking on from a distance." Who is right? How would you resolve this obvious divergence?
- g. "The mother of Zebedee's children" had asked Jesus that James and John be placed on His left and right in His Kingdom. What do you think went through her mind as she saw the King hanging on a cross between two bandits, one on His left hand and one on His right?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The centurion was standing facing Jesus. When he and the men, who were guarding Him, felt the earthquake and saw what was taking place, especially how Jesus died, they were deeply shaken. The centurion gave glory to God by exclaiming, "Unquestionably, this man was innocent! He really was God's Son!"

When all the people, who had gathered to witness this spectacle, saw what took place, they returned home, expressing their deep grief. All those who knew Jesus and the numerous women who, when He was in Galilee, regularly followed Him and looked after His needs, stood off at a distance, watching it all. Among those who had come up with Him to Jerusalem were Mary of Magdala, Mary

the mother of James "the Little" and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons, Salome.

### SUMMARY

The officer and men in charge of the execution reacted to the dramatic events that occurred in connection with Jesus' death, especially the way Jesus Himself gave up His life, by confessing Jesus' innocence and deity. Other spectators expressed their deep grief, while Jesus' acquaintances remained at a distance, watching the scene.

### NOTES

All the ends of the earth will remember  
and turn to the Lord,  
And all the families of the nations  
will bow down before Him,  
For dominion belongs to the Lord  
And he rules over the nations (Ps. 22:27f.).

27:54 **Now the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.** Although the centurion's expression is most memorable, apparently several of the Romans were deeply affected by *the things that were done*. Matthew reports the fine confession as the conviction of several soldiers (pl. *légonies, saying*). Independently of the degree of information and understanding each man had about the true *God*, they discern in the fearful events surrounding the death of *this* man something more than a routine execution. Does raw superstition ordinarily praise God (Luke 23:47)? Or is this the Evangelist's evaluation, i.e. the Romans unconsciously glorified God by their confession? The centurion stood facing Him, so was in an excellent position to observe everything (Mark 15:39). There is little opportunity for deception in his case. Most impressive for military men who have witnessed many men die is the lordly composure and self-mastery evident in the way **THIS MAN** concluded His life (*houtós*, Mark 15:39). Whereas they themselves had mocked Him before (Luke 23:36f.), they had time to gain a healthy respect for someone so self-disciplined even in death as not to reply to the vile outpourings of venomous minds, but pray for the offenders instead (I Peter 2:23ff.).

*Son of God*: did the *centurion* really attest to the divine identity of Christ, or did his words represent a heathen notion: "a son of the gods concerning whose undeserved death the gods were angry?" A primary consideration for determining the *centurion's* meaning must be the language that he had been hearing all morning. Further, was this *centurion* involved in guarding Jesus during His trial before Pilate? (Cf. John 19:7.) If so, what other impressions of Him had begun to form at that time? Unquestionably alert at the cross, he heard the native leaders hurl this very charge at the Man on the central cross: "He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (*theou eimi huios*; 27:40, 43, see notes.). This was the claim that sealed His fate. We may grant that the *centurion* probably did not use their words with the full theological grasp of the Jewish leaders themselves. Nevertheless, if he had been reflecting on this underlying charge, even if it was not actually expressed in the title on His cross, then it would not be at all surprising to hear him conclude that the Jewish leaders were wrong. He was the Son of God after all.

The Romans had also heard Jesus utter two prayers unquestionably addressing God as "Father" (Luke 23:34, 46). Contrary to the Jewish verdict, the Man on the central cross is not merely "innocent" (*kikaios*; Luke 23:47), but also truthful about what He claimed to be, superhuman. To stare death in the face and keep up the false pretense is abnormal unless significantly true. Nevertheless, His dying words commended His spirit to the Father whose Son He claimed to be. This too convinced the soldiers Jesus was righteous. Perhaps no single fact produced this conviction, but the combination of events rising to a dramatic climax: His character under fire, His readiness to die for His convictions and the portentous, unearthly circumstances surrounding His death, led them to conclude He was God's Son. Even in death He powerfully convinced them and they became the first Gentiles to be led to confess the truth about Jesus. Lenski (*Luke*, 1156) is right: "Why reduce these confessions to the lowest possible level? If they amounted to next to nothing, why were the inspired writers allowed to set them down for all time?"

This *centurion* was not known to be a God-fearer from the beginning, like his fellow officers at Capernum (8:10) and Caesarea (Acts 10:1f.). Nevertheless, to maintain that he was a polytheistic pagan is to affirm more than is known, especially since he had heard much that day.. Most remarkable is that they make this startling admission, *even though Jesus did not utilize the power typical of a Son of God to save Himself from execution.*

## Love that would not go away

**27:55** And many women were there beholding from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him. Jesus' friends now stood *beholding from afar*, for many reasons; a few perhaps for fear of being implicated with Jesus, others out of sheer decency to Jesus because their grief would increase His burden, others because helpless to prevent this tragedy, others because uncomprehending and yet rooted there by love stronger than fear. Practically everyone would keep his distance so long as the soldiers guarding the crosses maintained a security zone around the crucifixion area. Until the other two criminals died, the soldiers would cordon off Calvary. And so long as Jesus' powerful enemies monopolized the perimeter around the cross, His friends would maintain their distance.

The Gospel writers emphasize the presence of devoted Galilean women who had followed . . . ministering to Him, especially "when He was in Galilee" (Mark 15:41). These constituted an essential support group, preparing food, washing clothes, etc., so that Jesus and the apostles might labor unhindered. The normalness of this service is more evident when it is remembered that of the women named by the Gospel writers, three are mothers or aunts of a number of the apostles and Jesus. (See on 27:56.) Such wealthy women as Joanna and Susanna distinguished themselves by contributing heavily to the group's financial support (Luke 8:1-3). Even though inexcusable, the absence of the men is somewhat understandable, since they could be accused of a violent rescue plot, whereas the women, normally, would not bear arms. But where were the Eleven? Although John was there, the others are conspicuous for their absence. We may charitably imagine them silently *beholding from afar*, so that John, Mary and a couple of women could venture near the cross unchallenged.

**27:56** Among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the author of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. His mother had also been present (John 19:25ff.). *Mary Magdalene* was the grateful disciple from Magdala in Galilee (Luke 8:2), absolutely not to be identified with the woman of Luke 7:37. *Mary the mother of James and Joses* was presumably wife of Clopas, brother of Joseph, hence Mary's sister-in-law. If Salome was *the mother of the sons of Zebedee*, then she was Mary's sister (John 19:25). No doubt these dear women all possessed courage and love, but the latter two, probably Jesus' aunts, had also a kinswoman's right to be there. For fuller notes on these women, see Special Study, "The Brethren of the Lord," my volume III, 185ff., esp. 188.

These four women stood much closer to the cross earlier (John 19:25). It is entirely possible that they arrived near the cross shortly before Jesus' death. (Study John's sequence: John 19:25-30.) However, that they were closer earlier and have now moved away from the cross to watch the end, may be perceived from two considerations suggested by McGarvey (*Evidences of Christianity*, 44):

1. Since John's account omits the great darkness, Jesus' consignment of Mary to His disciple very likely preceded it. Without some clear gesture visible to all, it would not be clear precisely to whom His words "Woman, behold your son!" and "Behold your mother!" were addressed. Because His hands were nailed to the cross, the only gesture possible was a nod of the head or a movement of His eyes as He spoke to each one. These would not be visible once the darkness began, hence must be sought for during the first three hours of daylight.
2. If the women arrived at the cross early, before His enemies began defiantly jeering at Jesus, then as this painful scene degenerated, making it both dangerous and painful for Jesus' disciples to remain near, they would naturally desire to withdraw to a safe distance where we find them when Jesus expired.

Further, if the onset of the alarming darkness caused the soldiers to clear the area around the cross for security, the women would have to keep their distance with the others. This is where we find them in the Synoptics. If, when Jesus consigned His mother to him, John immediately guided her away from this terrible place, this would explain why Mary is not named at this later time. John, however, returned to see the end (John 19:35).

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Who or what is a centurion?
2. Quote the testimony that the centurion and his men bore to Jesus.
3. What is meant by the Romans' exclamation? List everything they could have witnessed that day which would lead to the astonishing conclusion involved in the exclamation.
4. Of what force or value is this Roman testimony, especially in a Jewish Gospel like *Matthew*?
5. Name the disciples present at the crucifixion.
6. In what way(s) had the women contributed to Jesus' ministry?

7. Explain the probable kinship of two of these women to Jesus.
8. Give a reasonable hypothesis why Jesus' mother is not named in Matthew's list of women.

### Jesus is Buried

TEXT: 27:57-61

57 And when even was come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: 58 this man went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded it to be given up. 59 And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. 61 And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why did Joseph of Arimathea approach Pilate for permission to request the body for burial? What further interest would Pilate have in this question?
- b. Why did it take particular courage for Joseph to request the body of Jesus? What could it possibly have cost him?
- c. What do you suppose brought Joseph, a secret disciple, out into the open in this bold way?
- d. How many disciples of Joseph's caliber do you think moved in the circles of Jewish high society?
- e. Why was everybody in such a great hurry to bury Jesus' body?
- f. Do you think Joseph's solution to bury Jesus in his own new tomb was a temporary or a permanent one in Joseph's mind?
- g. Why did they roll a great stone to the door of the tomb? Why not just shut the door?
- h. Why do you think the women followed Nicodemus and Joseph to the tomb?
- i. Why were there only two women at the tomb? Were they helping in some way or just watching? If the latter, what good would this do? Of what special importance to us is their being there watching?
- j. Do you think *you* could have buried Jesus? *Would* you have done it?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The time was already after mid-afternoon. Since it was Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, a man of means named Joseph of Arimathea came forward. An honored member of the Sanhedrin, he was a good, upright man who had dissented from that council's plot and its execution. He lived in the expectation of personally seeing the beginning of God's Kingdom. He too was Jesus' disciple, however secretly, because he was intimidated by the unbelievers in Israel. He found the courage to go straight to Pilate and request that he might take away Jesus' body.

Pilate was surprised to hear that He were dead so soon. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus were already dead. When he heard the centurion's report that He was dead for some time, Pilate ordered that the body be consigned to Joseph.

So Joseph purchased a linen sheet and lowered the body from the cross. Nicodemus, the man who had called on Jesus by night, arrived too, bringing a 33 kg. (75 lb.) mixture of myrrh and aloes. They took His body and wrapped it along with the spices in the clean linen sheet, like the Jews usually prepare their dead for burial.

Now in the area where Jesus was crucified there was a garden in which Joseph had recently carved his own new tomb right into the rock. It was so new that no one had been buried in it yet. So, because it was the Jewish Friday and the Sabbath was beginning, and since the tomb was conveniently close, they laid Jesus' body there. They rolled a heavy stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

Two women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and Nicodemus. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, the mother of Joses, were there sitting across from the tomb, observing how and where His body was laid there. Then they went home and prepared spices and ointments. Then they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

## SUMMARY

Two secret disciples of Jesus came out into the open: Joseph of Arimathea, a godly Jewish senator, and a rabbi, Nicodemus. Joseph boldly requested Pilate's permission to bury Jesus and received it. Nicodemus brought the necessary burial spices. Once the body was ready, they laid it in Joseph's new tomb nearby. The two Marys watched the men work, then went home to prepare other burial spices, then rested on Saturday.

## NOTES

. . . With the rich in his death . . . (Isa. 53:9)

What was to happen to Jesus' body when His leaderless disciples were caught completely unprepared to deal with the problem? God provided an unexpected solution.

**27:57** **And when even was come, there came a rich man from Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple.** Because these events occurred after three o'clock on Friday afternoon (27:46; Mark 15:42), the "dawning" of the Sabbath at sundown was not far away. So, *when even was come* (*opsias genoménes*) would mean "the first evening," according to the ancient Hebrew idiom for the middle of the afternoon, as opposed to the second evening at sundown. (See Exod. 12:6 in Hebrew: "between the two evenings.") It is highly doubtful (1) that any orthodox Jew would begin to bury at sundown when Jesus' death made this possible three hours earlier; or (2) that getting burial permission from Pilate, going to the cross, taking Jesus down, embalming and entombment could all have been accomplished in just a few minutes. It is more likely that Joseph and Nicodemus acted according to the usual custom of burying the dead shortly after death. Consequently, we may see them beginning sometime shortly after three o'clock (Cf. 9:23f.; 27:46, 50.)

Even if pagans commonly left victims of crucifixion hanging until they rotted or were eaten by scavengers, Jewish law demanded that they be removed the same day of the execution lest they desecrate the land (Deut. 21:22f.; cf. Josh. 8:29; 10:26f.; *Wars* IV,5,2). Traditional preparation for the Sabbath, too, would render it doubly important that the bodies not remain on the cross, desecrating also the Sabbath. So the Jews asked Pilate to order that death be accelerated for the crucified so they could be removed (John 19:31ff.).

Although burial preparations begun on Friday could proceed on the Sabbath (Edersheim, *Life*, II,786; cf. *Shabbath* 23.4f. cited by Barrett, *John*, 465), Jesus' friends would be actuated by the same logic as His enemies to terminate them whereinsofar possible before the Sabbath began. (See on 27:61.) To avoid the indignity of the common grave of criminals for Jesus, they must act rapidly. But who could care appropriately for this? From an unexpected quarter, *there came a rich man . . . named Joseph, also . . . Jesus' disciple* (*ematheteùthe tô Iesoû*, "discipled to Jesus." Cf. 13:52; 28:19; Acts 14:21). He hurried to Pilate, arriving shortly after the Jews

obtained the governor's permission to kill the condemned men. (See on 27:58.)

*Arimathaea*, if identified with Ramathaim, birthplace of Samuel (I Sam. 1:1), lay about 14.5 km. (9 mi.) northwest of Jerusalem. There is another Ramathaim about 73.5 km. (45 mi.) northwest of Jerusalem. Others place *Arimathaea* on the Jewish side of the border between Judea and Samaria about 35 km. (24 mi.) northwest of Jerusalem. (Cf. Luke 23:50.) Although he was from *Arimathaea*, he had since moved to the Jerusalem area, perhaps more easily to serve the Jewish Senate. The permanence of this move is suggested by his having built his tomb there. Thus, his name, Joseph of *Arimathaea*, only serves to distinguish him from many other men of the same name in Jerusalem.

Joseph's position as honored member of the Sanhedrin makes his intervention here remarkable, because he had dissented from that body's majority decision to crucify Jesus. However, his charitable character makes his deed predictably plausible. (Cf. Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50f.) Matthew omits every other distinctive except the fact that he was a *rich man*, perhaps to permit the sensitive reader to focus on this fulfillment of prophecy (Isa. 53:9). Most of Jesus' disciples were poor, obscure people and such lavish entombment would have been inaccessible for them. Unknown to them, God had reserved a man who had both loving devotion and wealth equal to the task of burying Jesus with dignity.

**27:58 This man went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded it to be given up.** Crises produce different reactions in people: those who had no hesitancy about admitting their discipleship to Jesus do not even come forward to claim His body, while it is the secret disciples who boldly step in to do this.

Considerable courage was required for this godly Sanhedrinist to approach Pilate, requesting for himself the corpse of someone who was not kin to him and whom his own colleagues condemned and Pilate executed as a criminal. He risked having to explain his connections with the Crucified. Although Joseph's loyalty had been hidden, it was genuine. Jesus' death shocked him into action and gave him the boldness he had not possessed until now (John 19:38; Mark 15:43).

Whereas Jesus' disciples had neither wealth nor connections, Joseph's loving respect moved him to throw his prestige into the balance by exerting his influence as a member of the Sanhedrin to

obtain the body and his wealth to secure an honorable burial. It was at the time of His severest humiliation that these aristocrats first confess Him. In this they join the believing centurion and the penitent robber. Despite His being lifted up, Jesus has already begun to draw men unto Himself (John 12:32; cf. 8:28).

Joseph apparently arrived at the Praetorium so shortly after the Jewish delegation had obtained the order for the bone-smashing, that Pilate was surprised that Jesus were already dead (Mark 15:44). Some consider Pilate's surprise incomprehensible, since he himself had just ordered that the condemned men's death be accelerated. Therefore, because he could assume that the soldiers' obedience to this order would assure the death of Jesus along with the others, his wonder, expressed after his own order, is thought impossible. However, because Pilate's order assumed that all three men were yet alive and must be quickly dispatched, he does not expect anyone to arrive so soon requesting one of the corpses. Perhaps even the Jews who approached Pilate did not know Jesus was dead, hence could not inform him of this. (Alternatively: they knew it but would not inform him, so he would order Jesus' legs broken too.) However, the governor had not yet received a final report on the execution of his order. Therefore, because he must not consign Jesus' body to one of His friends until it be quite certain that He was no longer alive, the prefect rightly demanded the positive certification from the centurion in charge. Only upon receiving the centurion's certification of Jesus' death, did Pilate grant Joseph the right to remove the body (Mark 15:44f.). That men survive for several days on the cross has nothing to do with the governor's surprise, because he had ordered the end of their survival!

That Jesus' body had not yet been removed from the cross need not seem strange. Joseph may have gone directly to the centurion at the cross and informed him of his intention to approach Pilate. The centurion, knowing that Jesus was dead and His side pierced, may have ordered his men to leave the body for Joseph to remove. Their duty ended with making certain the men executed were actually dead. To crush the legs of a man already demonstrably dead would be an unnecessary barbarity. Certainty of His death was assured by the fatal stab of the lance (John 19:31-37).

That these two secret disciples were so prepared for the burial of Jesus should not surprise, because anyone could foresee the political disaster to which Jesus' collision course with the priesthood and the

Pharisees must lead, making them pessimistic, hence, more ready for the crisis of His death than others. Further, Jesus' crucifixion that morning made His death that evening a foregone conclusion because of the Jewish tradition of not leaving bodies hanging overnight. So, both Joseph and Nicodemus found their course charted for them, and began buying the necessary linen and spices that day. Charitable burial of the dead was all the contingency plan they needed to move decisively when the emergency arose. (Cf. Tobit 2:16ff.; 21:ff.)

That Joseph went straight to Pilate even into the Praetorium, thus defiling himself by traditional definitions is unimportant, because by touching a dead body, he would defile himself anyway.

**27:59 And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth.** We need not suppose that Joseph worked alone. Not excluding servants, he could work with the women, perhaps John and any soldiers yet stationed at the cross. Perhaps Nicodemus' large quantity of spices were delivered by others who could help too. Taking the body down from the cross, it was perhaps first washed then taken to the tomb for final preparations, the linen and the spices.

Joseph had just bought this *clean linen cloth* (Mark 15:46). That he could do so during that Passover is established. (See notes on 26:17.) This *linen* was *clean*, i.e., not defiled by previous contact with something defiling, as another dead body. Nicodemus too came forward with a large quantity of spices: myrrh and aloes for the embalming (John 19:39-42; 100 *litras* = 100 ROMAN pounds = 33 kg = 75 lb.; cf. Ps. 45:8; II Chron. 16:14). This profuse evidence of his final devoted service is not unusual in its richness. (Cf. Mary's generosity, John 12:3; *Ant.* XVII, 8,3: The burial of Herod I, required 500 servants to bear the spices!) The *linen cloth* (*sindòn*) was apparently long enough not only to envelope the full body front and back, but also to be cut into strips (cf. pl. *onthònia*: John 19:40; 20:5-7; cf. John 11:44 *keirìai*). Then, spices in powder-form were sprinkled liberally into the various wrappings of the *linen cloth* as it was being wound around Jesus' body before being bound (Mark 15:46; John 19:40; cf. John 11:44). Then His head was covered by a large special cloth (John 20:7). Such embalming is totally inconsistent with belief in an immediate resurrection. For these disciples Jesus' death ended His ministry on earth and they express their last devotion in this way.

That these two men coordinated their efforts is suggested by their individual purchases: Nicodemus brought the spices without the linen and Joseph the linen without the spices. Neither item would be considered

appropriate or complete without the other. Perhaps their kindred spirits had drawn them together much earlier, but only the death of Christ brought their secret discipleship out into the open.

### The new focal point of history

27:60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. Joseph's *own new tomb* was located in a garden in the general vicinity of the crucifixion (John 19:41; cf. notes on 27:33). Even though Joseph had lived at Arimathea, he owned this garden near Jerusalem and, not impossibly, planned to be buried there. Its very nearness to the place of crucifixion may have prompted his offer, because time was not materially available for a distant burial. Its nearness to Jerusalem providentially facilitated the investigation of Jesus' resurrection. His *new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock* seems to have been a man-made cave carved horizontally into the stone face of a hill, rather than vertically down into the soil. (Cf. Isa. 22:16; Luke 8:27; Matt. 8:28.) Although it was large enough for at least two people to enter (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3; John 20:5ff., 12), its doorway appears to have been low, requiring anyone to stoop to look inside (John 19:5, 11). That Luke and John describe the tomb as "where no one had ever yet been laid," denotes the honor Joseph showed the Lord by not hesitating to place His body in a completely new tomb intended for his own use. (Cf. Luke 23:53; John 19:41.) Joseph could not have foreseen that his new tomb would have been utilized so quickly or for something so significant. Nor could he imagine that what he so unselfishly surrendered to the Lord's use would be so amazingly and so soon restored to him for his own use! Is *anything* sacrificed for the Lord's service ever *really* lost? (Cf. 19:29; 13:44; Heb. 10:34.)

Nicodemus' 100 Roman pounds of embalming spices would not exclude the addition of more spices on the part of the women. Concerning these large quantities, McGarvey (*Evidences of Christianity*, 42) rightly noticed that the Jewish custom of burying was not like the Egyptian embalming. (Cf. John 19:40.) This latter view of burial aimed at conserving the body by arresting decomposition, whereas the Jews apparently utilized spices only to mask the odor of decomposition without arresting it. Naturally, the greater the quantity of spices utilized, the more adequately this would function. This

would account for the 33 kg. (75 lb.) of spices brought by Nicodemus as well as the preparation or purchase of additional spices by the women, one on Friday evening and the other on Saturday just after sunset when Sunday began (Luke 23:56; Mark 16:1).

Why was Jesus not buried in one of the two places set aside by the Sanhedrin for executed criminals? (See Flusser, *Jesus*, 161, who cites Mishna. *Sanh.* 6,5.) Is the choice of burial site evidence that the glorious Sanhedrin of Israel was not responsible for the condemnation of Jesus or that He did not get a true trial before the highest council of Israel? If so, then Jesus was condemned by a kangaroo court, not by the true fathers of modern Judaism who must be defended at the expense of the Gospels. But that this thesis is unfounded is proven by the consideration that the decisively daring move made by Joseph of Arimathea pre-empted conciliar action to bury Jesus elsewhere. Further, the prestigious position of Joseph as a "respected member of the council," was his highest credential to convince Pilate to release the body to him (Mark 15:43). That Joseph acted without the knowledge and consent of the council may be assumed without proof, because, if the contrary were true, the Mishnaic citation of Flusser only proves, if anything, that the burial rule was of more flexible application in Jesus' time than Flusser's defense of the Sanhedrin would allow.

**27:61 And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.** Mark identifies *the other Mary* as Jesus' mother. (See on 27:56.) These loyal-hearted women from Galilee desired to see both the tomb and how Jesus' body was laid in it, so followed Nicodemus and Joseph (Luke 23:55). Because He was not to have an entombment in the regular cemetery at Jerusalem and since they had not yet seen Joseph's tomb, they needed to know "where He was laid" (Mark 15:47). This information would be needed when they returned to complete the embalming after the Sabbath. Perhaps they originally intended to care for the body themselves, but found that others had come forward with care more adequate than they themselves could have given. They undoubtedly drew much comfort from knowing that their Lord was appropriately buried with respect by two of the nation's leaders. Thus, while Joseph and Nicodemus proceed, the women *sit over against the sepulchre*, watching to see "how His body was laid." However, they did not remain at the tomb for long, because before sunset they left the tomb to prepare more spices and ointments to complete the embalming as

soon as the Sabbath ended (Luke 23:56). That they could purchase whatever was needed that festal Friday is already illustrated at 26:17. However, despite the urgency of embalming a body before decay would render their work impossible, they respected God's will and did no work on Saturday. The women's observing the tomb and the position of the body became a precious part of the evidence for Christ's resurrection, since they knew precisely which tomb had contained the body of Jesus. On resurrection morning they did not return to the wrong tomb and mislead others into thinking He has arisen.

Without detracting one bit of the glory of these faithful women who followed the body to the tomb, where were all the men? Surely after Jesus' death, they might hope that the pressure were over. No one came forward, because fear of the Jews haunted them until after the resurrection. (Cf. John 20:19.) Even if Joseph and Nicodemus were present and personally committed, the women acted themselves with greater courage than most of the men.

Instead of frantic wailing of mourning, Jesus' burial was quiet, serene, and majestic. Two statesmen, who until shortly before were afraid to admit their sympathy with Jesus' movement, now openly, tenderly and magnificently cared for His body. This loving care was completely different from what His enemies could have anticipated. Perhaps they imagined that His body would have been abandoned or tossed into the grave of common criminals. Instead, what had taken place was but the prelude of His glorification.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What time of day did the burial occur?
2. On what day was Jesus buried?
3. What prophecy (or prophecies) were fulfilled in Jesus' burial? Give the reference and a brief quotation to identify the text.
4. Describe Joseph of Arimathea, telling what you know of his character, economic strength and position in the Jewish society.
5. What was Joseph's interest in Jesus?
6. Describe the embalming and burial procedure followed by Joseph.
7. List the people who probably helped Joseph with the burial procedure.
8. Describe the tomb of Jesus, its location, its style, its closure, etc.
9. What were the women doing at Jesus' tomb?

## SECTION 75

## JESUS' TOMB IS GUARDED

TEXT: 27:62-66

62 Now on the morrow, which is *the day* after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together unto Pilate, 63 saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said while he was yet alive, After three days I rise again. 64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest haply his disciples come and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: and the last error will be worse than the first. 65 Pilate said unto them, Ye have a guard; go, make it *as* sure as ye can. 66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, the guard being with them.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose the Jews waited till Saturday to think about guarding Jesus' tomb against the disciples? Did not they risk quite a bit already? At about what time do you think they approached Pilate requesting a guard?
- b. Why did they request the guard just "until the third day"?
- c. How did they seal the tomb? How would this help protect the tomb from unauthorized manipulation?
- d. Why would the Jews have no scruple about setting the guard on duty during the Sabbath?
- e. Why do you suppose Pilate was so willing to concede them a guard at the tomb? What personal interest did he have in guarding the tomb against tampering?
- f. How do these accurate precautions contribute directly to your faith?

## PARAPHRASE

Next day, that is, the day after Friday, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered in a group before Pilate to say, "Sir, we recall that this imposter, while he was still alive, said, 'After three days I shall rise again.' Order, therefore, that the tomb be closely guarded until the third day, so that his disciples cannot go and steal the corpse, and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' The last piece of deception will be worse than the first."

“You have a guard of soldiers,” Pilate answered, “Go, guard it as well as you know how.”

So they went to make the tomb secure by setting a seal on the stone and by mounting a guard.

## SUMMARY

Jewish leaders, unwilling to risk a counter-move on the part of Jesus' disciples by spiriting away the body and claiming a faked resurrection, requested official permission to guard His tomb. Pilate sanctioned this move.

## NOTES

### HISTORY'S MOST FUTILE PRECAUTIONS

**27:62** Now on the morrow, which is the day after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together unto Pilate. That *the Preparation* is not a readying for the Passover but the normal weekly preparation for the Sabbath is authentically evidenced by Josephus (*Ant.* XVI,6,2) and by the practice of the Galilean women (Luke 23:56; Mark 16:1; cf. John 19:31; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54). Modern Greek continues the use of *Preparation* as the normal word for Friday. (See fuller notes on 26:17.) Hence, *the morrow, which is the day after the Preparation* is the Sabbath. It is not clear whether the Jews presented their request to the procurator after sundown on Friday (= Saturday) or after sunrise on Saturday. Since Jesus had expired around three p.m. and was buried shortly before sunset, the guard could move in almost immediately as soon as the prefect gave the word. The Jewish authorities undoubtedly acted as decisively as cunning foresight permitted them to perceive the direction a potential counter-attack of the Nazarene's disciples might take.

*The chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together unto Pilate*, perhaps not as a body, but privately lest their going to Pilate appear to be a violation of the Sabbath. Further, that these religious authorities went to Pilate on the Sabbath involves no incongruity for men who already violated every principle of their own jurisprudence to put Jesus on the cross. They could have little scruple about the Sabbath violation involved in standing guard on the Sabbath, since Gentile rather than Jewish soldiers would be employed for this.

However, when Matthew could have written more simply, his involved wording, *morrow, which is the day after the Preparation*,

seems as if he were studiously avoiding the expression "morrow, which is the Sabbath." (Cf. Mark 15:42.) Nevertheless, he could identify the day when the guard was set in two ways: (1) call it "the Sabbath" or (2) call it the day after Jesus died, i.e. the day after Friday. If his primary interest is to establish that the guard was set reasonably soon after the burial, then by choosing the latter expression he assures the reader that the guard was placed soon enough to avoid the theft of the body feared by Jesus' enemies and, thus, to guarantee the reality of the resurrection. Thus, Matthew's complicated expression actually certifies that the authorities would not leave the tomb unguarded for even one night during which a resurrection hoax could be executed. Thus, *morrow* is intended in the Jewish sense, i.e., after sunset on Friday evening (= Saturday).

**27:63 saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said while he was yet alive, After three days I rise again.**

At first glance it is astonishing that the Lord's enemies recalled a prediction of Jesus that should have emboldened His disciples, and did everything feasible to hinder it, while the disciples themselves neither remembered it nor did anything to enhance it! (Cf. John 20:9; Luke 24:25ff.; cf. Acts 17:3.) But God makes even men's unbelief to praise Him: Jesus' followers, because they did not yet believe He would rise, remained completely out of the situation and did not compromise the evidence. They thus facilitated the enemies' efforts at tightening security around Jesus' tomb to avoid a faked resurrection. These very precautions become our most convincing proof that the resurrection really occurred and that the hypothesis of a hoax is itself false.

How could the skeptical leadership of Israel remember what the most devoted disciples did not? Many, especially *Pharisees*, knew that Jesus predicted it (Matt. 12:38, 40; cf. v. 46). Jesus had predicted it in cryptic language of signs (John 2:18ff.; Matt. 12:38ff.; 16:4) and in frank expressions (16:21; 17:9, 22f.; 20:17ff.). His disciples puzzled over its meaning among themselves (Mark 9:9f.). Precisely because puzzling, the meaning of these prophecies might be debated beyond the circle of the inner group of disciples, and consequently leak out to a wider group, especially to the ever vigilant Pharisees. Again, all of Jesus' great well-known claims to come from God and return to Him supported the resurrection concept (John 7:33, 36; 8:21-30; 10:17-21). Finally, because He had resurrected Lazarus right under His opponents' nose, His predictions of His own resurrection took

on startlingly new power and meaning. Study the Sanhedrin's panic in this light (John 11:45ff., 57). There was no question that He had said it.

Rather, the difference in remembering is psychologically explicable on the basis of each group's reaction to it; the disciples wanted to believe Jesus would never need a resurrection, the enemies wanted to believe He could never accomplish it once they got Him dead. The disciples were stunned by their grief and blinded by their distorted vision of an immortal political Christ, but His enemies dreaded Jesus' influence even while dead.

### Precautions against imposture

**27:64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest haply his disciples come and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: and the last error will be worse than the first.** The Jews' suggestion, *Command*, argues that they had no intention of employing the Levitical Temple police to guard an unclean tomb area during the feast. Jewish guards may have had no authority beyond the Temple itself, hence, Roman soldiers were required.

Concerning the phrase, *Until the third day*, McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 68) wrote:

Why say "till the third day," if he was to rise *after three days*? We would have said, till the fourth day; for if he was to rise after three days it would not be earlier than the fourth day, though it might be later. Evidently they understood the time included in the expression "after three days" as terminating on the third day. And as Jesus had been buried near the close of a day, and they expected him to rise, if at all, on the third day, they must have counted the small fraction of a day that remained after his burial as one of the three days. Their expression, "till the third day," also shows that they expected him to rise before the third day would end, and that they therefore count a part of that day as a day.

They obviously meant to bracket the period He predicted for His entombment, so if the guard were set on Saturday (= even Friday night), the guard would remain until Monday, i.e. all day Saturday, Sunday and Monday. This, because the Jews were unaware of the

disciples' objective confusion and must utilize the broadest interpretation of the day count supposedly being used by anyone planning a hoax. Their alarm would be in force until Sunday evening (= Monday's beginning).

*Lest haply his disciples come and steal him away.* These guilty men who had stooped to betrayal to ensnare Jesus and deception to sentence Him to death, now fear that His men would also make use of some trick to recover the advantage. Little did they realize that these very followers, even after personally seeing Jesus risen from the dead, could hardly grasp what to do with this earth-shaking fact until Pentecost, much less make use of it to embarrass the Jews before then. They were emotionally incapable of simulating a resurrection!

*The last error (plâne, "deception")* proclaimed by the Galileans, that He had risen, *will be worse than the first* proclaimed by "that deceiver" (*ekéinos ho plânos*, 27:63), that He was the political Messiah, the king of the Jews. They imply that they fear Jesus' disciples' potential political power, if they could ever be persuaded that He were risen, whether true or not.

27:65 **Pilate said unto them, Ye have a guard: go, make it as sure as ye can.** This could be weary indifference, even though the prefect was as much concerned about quelling tendentious rumors as the Jews were. *Ye have a guard (écheté koustodian)* is a positive reaction that grants the request: "You have what you requested from me." He does not refer to their own detachment of Temple police. They had come to him requesting something they did not already possess or could have used without his permission. When the Roman soldiers report back to the chief priests after the resurrection (28:11), this only confirms their being at the disposal of the Jews, as Pilate affirms here.

*Make it as sure as ye can* are words more precious to the Christian than any other order the Roman governor ever gave. They secure the authenticity of the resurrection by guarding against the imposture of stealing the body.

27:66 **So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, the guard being with them.** This latter phrase suggests that the Jewish authorities were not content to entrust this critical detail to the Roman military, but actually supervised it personally. And would not their suspicions demand that someone be sent into the tomb to assure them that the body were really there before sealing the door? Then, after

stretching a cord across the face of the great stone door from one side of the tomb door to the other, embedding each end of the cord in sealing wax, they pressed an official seal into the hot wax to give the seals authority. The purpose of the seals is not to hold the door shut, but to threaten anyone from opening it without due authorization from him whose seals they were (cf. Dan. 6:17). So long as the seals remained intact, it would prove that no one had bribed the soldiers to open the door. Backing up the seals was the Roman *guard* (*koustodia*, Latin: "custodia").

It should cause no surprise that the historical reliability of this section has been attacked by critics. Certainly, it has tremendous apologetic value, in that it proves that Jesus was really buried and that His body could not have been stolen, because the tomb was guarded against precisely this eventuality. But does this prove that Matthew invented his facts? For a Gospel in circulation among Hebrews who could ascertain the truth through private investigation and interviewing the enemies of Jesus, it would be worse than simply fraudulent, were these fictitious "facts." The fundamental basis of Christianity, the certainty of Christ's resurrection, would be undermined by doubts at its source, the tomb of Joseph.

God would have the last laugh however, because that guard and that seal meant that these non-disciples would be forced to be the very first to bring the astounding news to Jesus' enemies that all their precautions had been futile (Ps. 2:4; 76:10). The disciples had indeed not tampered with the tomb or the body. He arose!

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What day follows the day of Preparation?
2. On what day was the guard placed on watch?
3. Who set the guard at the tomb?
4. Why was the guard placed there?
5. Why was Pilate requested to cooperate?
6. For how long was the guard to watch the tomb?
7. Why and how did they seal the tomb?
8. Explain Pilate's expression: "You have a watch."
9. Show how the Jews' diligence to avoid all deception served to establish incontrovertibly the reality of Jesus' resurrection.

## SECTION 76

## JESUS AROSE!

(Parallels: Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18)

TEXT: 28:1-10

1 Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. 3 His appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow: 4 and for fear of him the watchers did quake, and became as dead men. 5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who hath been crucified. 6 He is not here; for he is arisen, even as he said. Come see the place where the Lord lay. 7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples, He is risen from the dead; and lo, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. 8 And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word. 9 And behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail, and they came and took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. 10 Then saith Jesus unto them, Fear not: go tell my brethren that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose Matthew bothered to begin this new section with the expression, "After the Sabbath"? Why not begin simply, "Now as the first day of the week was dawning"? Is there something important in mentioning the Sabbath here?
- b. Why do you suppose that the two Marys wanted "to see the tomb"? Had they not already done so before the Sabbath started, when they watched Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepare the body for burial?
- c. Do you think they went to the tomb on Saturday evening, i.e. when Sunday was beginning, or on Sunday morning? Defend your answer.
- d. The women were eager to care for the body of Jesus, whereas the men disciples only went to the tomb when called, and then, only two of them went. Why do you think the men acted this way? Does not this show a serious failure of love for Jesus?

- e. What was the purpose of the angel's coming? To let Jesus out of the tomb?
- f. If the guards were frightened so greatly by what they saw, is it not possible to suspect their later testimony, precisely because of the irrationality chargeable to their fear?
- g. Is there any evidence in the text that the soldiers fled from the tomb when the angel appeared? If so, what is the proof? If not, what does the soldiers' continued presence at the tomb suggest about their later testimony?
- h. Other Gospel writers document the presence of TWO angels present, whereas Matthew only mentions one. How do you harmonize this discrepancy?
- i. The guards are scared out of their wits but the women calmly listen to the angel's message. Should it not have been the other way around?
- j. The angel ordered the women to tell the disciples that the risen Christ was going before them to Galilee where they would see Him. Were the disciples expected to rush to Galilee right then, or what? After all, as things turned out Jesus appeared to them that very evening (John 20:19). What do you think the angel expected the disciples to do?
- k. Despite so many predictions of Jesus' resurrection, why did not the disciples remember them until after it occurred? Why must the angel remind them here?
- l. The women departed from the tomb "with fear and great joy." How do you explain this peculiar psychological combination of emotions? Admitting that some women could have experienced one emotion and others another, on what basis can the same person truly experience both at the same time?
- m. If Jesus planned to show Himself alive to the women, why did the angel tell them to communicate to His disciples that seemingly superfluous message that He would appear to them in Galilee? Did not the angel know what Jesus planned, or did Jesus get the arrangements mixed up, or what?
- n. Jesus forbade Mary Magdalene to take hold of Him, yet the other women are permitted to approach Him and take hold of His feet and worship Him. How do you explain this contradictory conduct on Jesus' part? Or is there a difference in the attitude of the women? If so, what is it?
- o. If Jesus planned to show Himself alive to the disciples that very

evening, why did He too tell the women to inform the disciples that He would appear to them in Galilee?

- p. Why do you think Jesus appeared first to the women? Could not Jesus have foreseen that the testimony of women would tend to be discounted in that male-dominated society, even by His own male disciples?
- q. The women ran to His disciples to bring them the glad news of Jesus' resurrection. (a) What would be the effect today, if every disciple were to show the same happy zeal to bring these glad tidings to a world that is perishing? (b) Why do you think we fail to do this?
- r. What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean to you?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

When the Sabbath was over at sunset on Saturday, Mary of Magdala and Mary, James' mother, and Salome purchased aromatic oils, so they could go to embalm Jesus' body.

Then, late Saturday night, as it was beginning to get light on Sunday morning, the women, Mary from Magdala and the other Mary, went to see about the tomb very early, while it was still dark.

Suddenly, a violent earthquake occurred, because an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, approached the tomb and rolled the stone aside and sat on it. His appearance had the dazzling brightness of lightning and his clothing was white as snow. The sentries were so terrified by him that they trembled and became rigid with fear.

Carrying the aromatic spices which they had prepared for the embalming, the women arrived at the tomb shortly after sunrise. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone from the entrance of the tomb for us?"

But when they looked up, they discovered that the stone—huge as it was—had already been rolled away from the tomb. So Mary of Magdala went running to Simon Peter and Jesus' dearest disciple, John, and informed them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have put Him!"

Meanwhile, the other women went on inside the tomb, but they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they stood there not knowing what to think, suddenly, two men appeared to them in clothes that gleamed like lightning. In their fright the women instinctively bowed down with their faces to the ground. One of the angels appeared

as a young man sitting on their right, dressed in a white robe. This latter angel addressed the women.

“There is no need for alarm,” he said, “I know that you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was nailed to the cross. Why search among the dead for Someone who is alive? He is not here, because He came back to life again, just as He said He would! Come see the place where they laid Him! Remember how He told you, while He was still in Galilee, ‘The Son of man must be delivered over into the power of wicked men, be nailed to a cross and come back to life on the third day.’”

The women remembered that He had said that.

“Now you must go quickly and tell His disciples and Peter,” continued the angel, “He has risen from the dead and that He is going back to Galilee ahead of you. You will see Him there, just as He told you. This is the message I was to give you.”

So the women hurried away from the tomb, frightened, yet overjoyed. In fact, they were overcome with trembling and bewilderment. They did not tell anybody a single thing, because they were afraid. They simply ran to give the news to His disciples.

[At this point John reports the arrivals of Peter and John, then of Mary Magdalene to the tomb. The men arrive first and enter the tomb, but apparently met no angels. Mary sees the angels, then Jesus. Cf. Mark 16:9.]

Then, as the women were going away from the tomb to tell the disciples, suddenly Jesus Himself met them and said, “Hello!”

Going up to Him, the women hugged His feet and worshiped Him.

Then Jesus said to them, “You need not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee. They will see me there.”

Returning from the tomb, they told all this to the Eleven and to all the others. Mary Magdalene, for example, told those who had been His companions, as they were sorrowing and weeping, “I have seen the Lord!” She also told them what Jesus had said to her. Now it was Mary of Magdala, Joanna, Mary, James’ mother and the other women with them who told this to the Apostles. But when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by Mary of Magdala, this story of theirs seemed to them sheer nonsense. They continued to disbelieve the women.

## SUMMARY

On Saturday evening three women purchased embalming spices for use next morning. Then, early Sunday morning before daylight they start for the tomb. Meanwhile an angel comes to open the tomb. His coming shakes the earth and shocks the sentinels. The women arrive at the tomb at daybreak only to find the tomb already open. Mary of Magdala jumps to the conclusion that someone has moved the body. So, without actually examining the question farther, she runs to inform Peter and John. Meanwhile, back at the tomb, two angels inform the other women that Jesus is alive from the dead and that they are to inform Jesus' disciples. On their way to do so, Jesus appears to them and sent a message for His followers to meet Him in Galilee. Meanwhile, Peter and John race to the tomb, but do not see either Jesus or the angels. Mary of Magdala arrives later and sees both. Mary and the other women return to the apostolic group and report Jesus' resurrection, but no one believes them.

## NOTES

## ON THE THIRD DAY

**28:1 Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.** Although the accounts of the resurrection differ as to details, as sometimes happens in the case of valid testimony, the general picture of the events is substantially consistent. Such differences, rather than undermine the accounts, tend to confirm their authenticity, because exact superficial harmony would be suspicious precisely because contrived. If it could be shown that two witnesses claim to discuss the same event or detail and appear to contradict each other, then a real problem would exist. However, simple differences of detail are but evidence of honest, independent testimony.

A sound juridical approach is to assume the reasonable accuracy and honesty of the witnesses and attempt to see whether their witness can be harmonized into a unified account that is consistent. Otherwise, they get treated as dishonest or mistaken until proven correct, an improbable hypothesis in the light of the ease with which the opposition could have disproven their assertions, had they been honestly mistaken about, or, worse, concocting, anything they testify.

Our approach shall be to find that explanation which permits each witness to be treated as fundamentally honest and which alleviates any supposed divergence between the Gospels. Past attacks on harmonizing approaches assume that the harmonist must prove his theoretic explanation. On the contrary, given our present state of information, it only need be demonstrated that a plausible explanation of the supposed divergency exists to remove the charge of inconsistency or contradiction levelled against the Gospels. After all, were the resurrection the bold invention of shameless charlatans, surely its authors would have taken greater care to eliminate the many problems in the accounts so as to create the kind of strict, even if superficial, agreement that some minds find comfortable. (For an excellent harmonization, see Wilson, *Learning From Jesus*, 516-521; also James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 155f.; Butler, *Luke*, 576ff.; *John* II, 463ff.)

*Late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week* (*opsè dè sabbàtôn tēi epifoskousei eis mian sabbàtôn*). The ASV translation is particularly unfortunate here, because apparently self-contradictory and because Matthew is forced to contradict the other Gospel writers. The problems in this translation turn on two factors:

1. *Opsè* can mean "late."
2. *Epifòskô*, "to dawn," considered as a Hebrew idiom wherein the day begins at sunset, can refer to a time coincident with the closing of the preceding day (Luke 23:54).

If the time in question was *late on the Sabbath day*, Matthew means *sundown*, when Sunday begins, or "dawns," according to the idiom. However, this rendering leaves the impression that Matthew thought the resurrection occurred on Saturday, as opposed to the other witnesses who are certain it occurred on Sunday morning. But if *epifoskousei* ("dawning") be taken literally, Matthew means around *sunup*, in which case there is no justification for his reference to a time *late on the Sabbath day*, for that day ended at sundown the day before. Matthew certainly would not contradict himself in the same verse. Further, the final translation must recognize that his two expressions are two ways of referring to the same time. Two factors point the way out of the morass:

1. *Opsè* can be translated "after" (Arndt-Gingrich, 606; Blass-Debrunner, §164.4; Rocci, 1383). To render the phrase, "After

the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week" (RSV), better suits the context and harmonizes with the other Gospels.

2. *Epiphoskousei* can be taken in its natural, literal sense, rather than idiomatically.

Matthew treats the period of darkness which came to an end at dawn on Sunday as still belonging to Saturday, but actually after the Sabbath was over. That the moment in question is early Sunday morning is vindicated by the following considerations: (Cf. notes on 27:63f.; esp. on 12:40, my Vol. II, 708ff.).

1. Since the difficult expression can actually be translated and interpreted in harmony with the distinctly clearer testimony of the other Gospels who unequivocally place the resurrection appearances on Sunday morning, why should it not be so rendered?
2. The women who go to the tomb on Sunday morning are *Mary of Magdala and the other Mary*, who was also the mother of James, and Salome. (Cf. Mark 16:1.) Perhaps there were also others, like Joanna. (Cf. Luke 23:55—24:1, 10.) These wonder, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?" (Mark 16:3). Now, if these same women had stopped at the tomb on Saturday evening as they were out buying burial spices (Mark 16:1), they would have encountered the soldiers guarding it. Granted that their timidity might hinder their seeking help from Roman soldiers and that they are probably thinking of assistance from some male disciples like Joseph or Nicodemus or others, yet, *they could not have wondered about any help at all*. Rather, had they seen the soldiers before arriving on Sunday morning, they would have worried about the soldiers' inflexibility that would not permit them to break the seal on the tomb in order to open it, even to embalm the body.
3. Mark has two definite notices of time, whereas Matthew only one. (Cf. 28:1 with Mark 16:1, 2.) Mark narrates facts that occurred on two successive days, on Saturday evening just as the Hebrew Sunday was beginning, then on Sunday morning about sun-up. Mark's distinction should be represented by two separate paragraphs. The assumption that Matt. 28:1 is parallel with Mark 16:1, or worse, derived from it, leads to the conclusion that Matthew thought that the resurrection occurred on *Saturday night*, whereas the other Evangelists place it as quite early on Sunday morning. (Cf. Mark 16:9; Luke 23:56; 24:1.) It also assumes that the women

purchased additional spices around dawn on Sunday morning on the way to the tomb, whereas Mark suggests that they took the spices which they had prepared the night before, i.e. on Saturday night.

4. The purpose of the women's coming is expressed vaguely as being *to see the sepulcher*. But were it limited to that, they could have come on Saturday night. Their intention is more fully indicated by their bringing the embalming spices (Luke 24:1; cf. 23:56; Mark 15:47; 16:1). Therefore, they think that they both *can* enter the tomb with no more serious hindrance than the heavy stone, and that they *should* do so to embalm a corpse. Their pre-dawn departure from their lodging indicates their haste to deal with a quickly decomposing body. So, they obviously know nothing about the seal or the soldiers and they do not expect Jesus to be risen. Luke 23:56 definitely states they rested on the Sabbath. Hence, although they could have recommended the embalming on Saturday night, it would have been an unusual time without adequate motive, since they would have to work on into the night by torch- or candlelight, when on Sunday morning an entire day would be at their disposal.

Matthew simply means that, although the women intended to complete the embalming, they waited until Sunday morning.

*As it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.* Because some believe that Mark, Luke and John are hopelessly contradictory as to the time element involved, it is altogether appropriate to see that the translation makes considerable difference:

John 20:1: Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene **left** for the tomb early, *while it was still dark.*

Luke 24:1: But on the first day of the week, *at early dawn*, they **went** to the tomb. . . .

Mark 16:2: And very early on the first day of the week they **came** to the tomb *when the sun had risen.*

The Greek verb rendered in **bold face** in every case is *échomai* (= *elthon*), which means "come" or "go," according to context (Rocci, 770; Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 310f.). The rendering to be utilized remains the translator's choice based on appropriateness to the situation. However, some translators ignore the problems

of harmonizing all available testimony and of assuming the witness to be telling the truth until proven false. Consequently, they created contradictions for readers unacquainted with this phenomenon in Greek. The supposed divergency is removed by simply using the other, completely appropriate alternative translation.

**28:2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it.** *For* connects the earth tremor directly with the angel's coming, but it is not clear whether it was simply contemporaneous with his coming or caused by it. Because a *great earthquake* is an event which man can neither impede nor ignore, just as at His death, its occurrence at precisely this moment is not merely coincidental and must be judged an appropriate accompaniment—better: announcement?—of Jesus' resurrection. (See notes on 27:51.)

Evidently, the angel *rolled away the stone* before the women reached the tomb, since they found it already removed upon their arrival (Mark 16:4; Luke 24:2; John 20:1). The stone was rolled away, not to let Jesus out, but to let the resurrection's witnesses in! (Cf. Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3; John 20:6ff.) Leaving the sealed tomb was no problem for the Lord of life. (Cf. John 20:19, 26.) In fact, did Jesus arise when the angel came, or had He already left the tomb by simply walking away from it as simply as He entered the closed Upper Room? Precisely when Jesus emerged from the tomb is not stated. Rather, Matthew's silence implies that He had already risen. Matthew does not describe the actual resurrection of Jesus nor affirm that anyone witnessed it. So, those who became "witnesses to the resurrection" are actually witnesses of the accomplished fact, rather than of the event itself. (Cf. Acts 1:22.)

When *the angel . . . rolled away the stone*, he heaved the huge disk down onto the ground before he *sat upon it*. By this superb gesture the angel seems to express the heavenly authority with which the tomb's seals were broken and the great stone door opened. The grip of death is broken by heavenly power. And neither ancient nor modern scepticism have been able to reclose the open sepulcher of our Lord.

*The angel* is described by Mark and Luke as "two (young) men," because heavenly messengers are often described by their appearance in human form. (Cf. Gen. 18:2, 16, 22; 19:1, 5; Judg. 5:23; 13:6; Acts 1:10.)

Mark and Luke report the presence of two angels (Luke 24:4). It is difficult to decide whether Matthew is simply summarizing by referring to the most prominent speaker of the two, or whether another appeared later. Omitting to mention the other angel does not create a contradiction, since Matthew does not affirm there was *only one* angel. His evident purpose is to report the message the women were to announce. Two possible harmonizations exist:

1. Perhaps the women encounter the first angel outside the tomb where he had frightened the soldiers and rolled away the stone door. He then invites the women into the tomb to verify his word. They enter, but do not find the body. Instead, they encounter another angel seated on the right side of the ledge. Then, perhaps he arose and the women find themselves standing between two heavenly beings and are frightened (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3ff.). Later, when Mary Magdalene arrives, she finds the two angels both inside the tomb (John 20:12).
2. Matthew does not affirm that the angel met the women outside, whereas Mark and Luke definitely affirm that they talked with an angel inside. Accordingly, the women ignored the fallen soldiers and rushed into the tomb and encountered both angels inside. Only one of them speaks (according to Matthew and Mark), but because the other confirms the testimony of the first, he may be said to have spoken (Luke 24:5). On this view, the angels arrived, one rolled away the stone and sat on it, thus frightening the guards. Then they entered the tomb. The women, upon arrival, found the two angels together inside.

The fact that the women encounter a varying number of angels, in different locations, standing and sitting, etc., is not at all irreconcilable with the sudden appearance of angels elsewhere in Scripture. The apparent contradiction between the Gospels is caused by each writer's reference to a different phase of the scene or to a different principle speaker. No writer claims to tell all he knows about the picture. Cross-questioning of the witnesses and writers is now no longer possible, but the hypothesis of a plausible harmony exonerates them from embarrassment of proven error.

**28:3 His appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow.** The blinding flash of light from heaven took definite, human form. (Cf. Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4.) Unless this phrase contains Hebrew parallelism, because a distinction is made between *his appearance*

and *his raiment*, the former is thought to refer to his face. His total appearance resembles the angels of the Old Testament (Dan. 10:6) and the glorified Christ (17:2 = Mark 9:2f. = Luke 9:29; cf. Rev. 1:14ff.). The intense radiance reflected the glory of God whom he represented. (Cf. Exod. 34:29f.) *His raiment white as snow* resembles that of heaven's inhabitants (Rev. 4:4), not only the angels (Dan. 10:5f.; Luke 2:9; Acts 1:10; Rev. 10:1; 18:1) but also the saints (Rev. 3:4f.; 6:11; 7:13f.; 19:8) and God (Ezek. 1:26f.; Dan. 7:9).

**28:4 and for fear of him the watchers did quake, and became as dead men.** Even if these guards were not on the crucifixion detail, barracks rumors could give them reason to be apprehensive about this night duty. Just when it was almost over, there was a sudden, terrific shaft of light from heaven and the ground under their feet waved violently. The sentinels found themselves face to face with the true guard of honor at the tomb of the risen Christ! The shock left them paralyzed with *fear of him*. Any opposing reaction on their part was effectively preempted by a force with which they were psychologically unprepared to cope. Although they *became as dead men*, it is not clear whether they were completely unconscious. Perhaps they were simply immobile, as if dead. This supposition argues that the guard did not flee immediately upon the arrival of the angel, but at some undesignated time later, after the women arrived. (See on 28:11.)

At this point the women arrive at the garden tomb. However, because of the great size of the stone used to close the tomb, they could see at a distance that the tomb door was already ajar. Without investigating further or pausing to reflect that perhaps the tomb's owner had returned to help complete the embalming, Mary Magdalene wrongly inferred that the tomb had been rifled, the body gone. On the basis of this mistaken deduction she left the women at the garden and rushed to inform Peter and John (John 20:1ff.). This detail explains how Jesus could appear first to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; John 20:11ff.), although she left for the tomb earlier with the other women (28:1). From Luke we learn that, besides Mary the mother of James and Joseph, there were others, among whom Joanna (Luke 24:10). If we may infer that the same women who bought the spices on Saturday night, also brought them to the tomb Sunday morning, then Salome came too (Mark 16:1f.). Disappointed that Jesus had failed, they still loved Him, and would now serve Him for the last time, though He were dead. (For their identification, see notes on 26:56)

and the Special Study: "The Brethren of the Lord," my Vol. III, 185ff.)

Because the guards were terrorized into immobility, the women who would have been impeded from entering the tomb before, can now procede.

**28:5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who hath been crucified.** Although Matthew named only *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary*, the former is now gone to inform Peter and John. So, by saying *women*, our author incidentally confirms what the other Gospels affirm, i.e. the presence of the others.

*The angel* intended is the principle speaker. He *answered*, or addressed, their unasked questions and astonishment. *Fear not ye:* addressed to the women, the *ye (humets)* is emphatic. Although fright in the presence of the supernatural is a normal reaction, the women are not to be terrified like the guards. The women are also not to *fear* that something terrible has happened to Jesus' body. His authoritative assurances seek to calm them. *For I know that you seek:* this justifies his calming tone and language. He treats them as friends of his own Lord. That the angel described Jesus as *Him who hath been crucified* sounds oddly out of tune with the resurrection victory. But this old, old story is already a theme sung in glory (Rev. 1:5ff.; 5:9, 12; 7:9; 12:10f.). Further, he addresses women who mistakenly expected to find the Crucified One's dead body in this sepulcher.

**28:6 He is not here; for he is risen, even as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.**

1. The IRREFUTABLE FACT: "*He is not here . . . come, see the place where the Lord lay.*" The heavenly message was backed by earthly proof.
  - a. This is tangible, circumstantial evidence of the reality. They were to examine the calm order of the linen wrappings and folded face-cloth and conclude that, were His corpse stolen, these items would have been missing. Instead, He Himself had removed the burial clothes, neatly set everything in order and left the tomb, unquestionably alive.
  - b. *The place where the Lord lay:* what humiliation for the Lord of glory! What infinite grace and love permitted Him to be brought so low! But because He entered into our death, He disarmed our fear of the tomb (Heb. 2:15).
2. The EXPLANATION: *for He is risen.* Were anyone but an angel

speaking, this would be simply a possible, logical implication of the empty tomb. But this is not merely an inference, but God's revelation of a fact. Without the intervention of human beings or angels, He left His grave behind Him forever (Mark 9:31; Luke 18:33; John 10:17f.). It is also true to translate, *He was raised (egérthē)*, since His victory is ascribed also to the Father (16:21; 17:23; Acts 2:24, 32; Rom. 8:11).

Those who attempt to explain the resurrection as a pure visionary apparition that projected messages from the other world to the brain of the early disciples, must face the eloquent fact of the empty tomb. Further, the actual messages that came were not simply to comfort the apostles that everything was going to be all right or simply that Jesus' soul was then living with God and sends His love. Rather, the angels and Jesus Himself transmitted the same central message that His physical body had left the grave alive.

3. The PROPHETIC WORD: *as He said.* (Cf. 16:21ff.; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 9:43-45). Despite His many predictions, the disciples' emotional rejection of His coming death blinded their minds to the truth. What they did not accept, they did not expect. But this deserved but gentle rebuke, however, comforts them, because their unbelief did not keep His often repeated supernatural promise from coming to pass: He faithfully kept His word! (Cf. Luke 24:6.) His resurrection put God's stamp of approval on everything He said or did, but it especially established Him as a true Prophet of God. (Cf. Deut. 18:15-22.)

**28:7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples, He is risen from the dead; and lo, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.** This story is so well-founded that they themselves may join in telling it too. An evil angel had communicated the message which brought sin and death into the world. Woman had been the first to believe and tell man and pass it on to the human race. Now the Lord's angel commissions woman to be the first to announce death's defeat to man. Let no man or woman consider themselves too lowly to be a humble link in God's chain to proclaim the Gospel to others.

But these are not "just incompetent, excited women liable to believe anything!" Their training in righteousness as disciples of Jesus should indicate much about their reliability and basic honesty. These women

proved themselves competent to testify to Jesus' resurrection by closely observing everything that involved His suffering. Their being devoted friends or aunts of Jesus only apparently disqualifies them by compromising their objectivity, for no scientific commission in the world could furnish a more accurate observation of the unique fact to which they testify. For the disciples, the character and stability of these women was already proven. For the enemies, the facts they report were already proven. (See on 28:11-15.) For the readers of the Gospels, the corroboration of their testimony with the many other appearances of Jesus consolidates their case.

The testimony of these women would be discounted by the male disciples, but not on the ground that these women were objectively incompetent. Certainly, Jewish bias against the testimony of a woman entered into the question. However, the men's refusal to believe the women arose, not from investigation of the women's evidence and competence, but from an emotional bias against the objective probability of the resurrection of Jesus. Whatever the origin of their opinion, it was nonetheless a prejudice. Similarly, men today reject the resurrection because of intellectual and moral prejudice against the possibility of the supernatural. Although the Lord Himself would grant "many convincing proofs that He was alive" (Acts 1:3), He rightly criticized the Apostles for rejecting the women's unassailable personal testimony (Mark 16:14). Jesus made the principle of credible witness the basis of His Gospel and a standing rule for all time (John 20:24-31, esp. v. 29; cf. Rom. 10:13-17; II Peter 1:12-18).

*Lo, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him.* This victory would yet be celebrated together with Jesus alive on earth at the glorious reunion in Galilee precisely on schedule, just as He predicted (26:32)! *He goeth before you* (*proagei*, present tense) does not mean that He is at this moment traveling to Galilee, but is used more generally to confirm His project: He is actually going there ahead of you, just as He promised. They understood this promise, *there shall ye see him*, as general, referring broadly to all the disciples. (Cf. Luke 24:9: "all the rest.") It does not intend to preclude the appearance of Jesus to the women just a few moments later (28:9). Since nothing is said of His intention to appear to the despondent, broken-hearted disciples that very day, they must simply act on a faith already severely tried. Even so, this precious hope aims to stir a joyous expectation in them.

Jesus' strategy in the choice of *Galilee* may have various motives:

1. If they shared the Jewish belief that the ghost of the departed hovered about the tomb for several days after death, in Galilee there would be no suspicion that the post-resurrection phenomena they observed were this sort of spectral apparition. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, II,631.) His appearances in Galilee, far from the scenes of horror surrounding His death and burial, would, therefore, tend to undergird the disciples' certainty of His resurrection.
2. After expecting the disciples to believe the testimony of those who had seen Him alive, He gave them their second lesson in acting by faith. For them to return to *Galilee* to see Him required believing the testimony sufficiently to make the trip without Him, just trusting Him to keep the well-attested appointment. In an atmosphere of faith it is easy to believe. But the physical act of walking to Galilee took them away from a highly charged ambient where people could expect apparitions to occur. It removed the powerful, psychological atmosphere that permits or induces the hallucination. His appearance in broad daylight at a great distance from places associated with His former appearances would increase their certainty that "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared."
3. The location facilitated His control over the choice of witnesses of His resurrection (Acts 10:40f.). First the Passover pilgrims are allowed to go home to their various lands and nations. Then, in the calm of an obscure mountain in Galilee, He could accomplish so much more by revealing Himself to a severely restricted number of disciples.
4. *Galilee* is home. (See note on 26:32.) In this brilliant touch of psychological appropriateness Jesus is revealed His genius and condescension to their weaknesses and need. His present task was to reconstitute the apostolic group, now fragmented because of His death (26:31f.). Judas was dead, Thomas alone in his dark world, the others with no unifying sense of mission left. Although He would reiterate the commission in Jerusalem both before and after the Galilean appearance (Luke 24:44; John 20:21f.), and although they would all return eventually to Jerusalem to witness His ascension and await the Pentecostal arrival of the Holy Spirit, His principle purpose for the time being for sending them to *Galilee* was to take them back home. He knew that in *Galilee*, they could form a clearer concept of their mission. While standing in and looking at the old, familiar scenes of Galilee, the very area where they had already labored successfully in His Name and by His

power—even in His absence—, they could more easily conceive of the feasibility of world evangelism. In *Galilee* a world mission did not appear so impossible, because they had labored there by His grace. So, even as He had commissioned them originally on a Galilean *mountain* and taught them (Luke 6:12ff.; cf. Matt. 5:1), so now He would take them back to their origins as a group, commission them, placing upon their shoulders even greater responsibilities and promise them even greater power (28:16-20; Mark 16:16ff.). In *Galilee*, they had tried their wings; in *Galilee*, they received their new, permanent commission to world evangelism. In this vividly suggestive, physical environment Jesus taught them to see that yesterday the target was *Galilee*, today it is the world!

*There shall ye see him:* Even the Jewish authorities knew that belief in the resurrection was not definitively determined by the empty tomb, because a desperate hypothesis of theft could still be concocted to explain that perplexing discovery. The irrepressible excitement of the Gospel was not the product of reports from reliable sources that His body had not been found in the tomb and that mysterious messengers had announced the resurrection as a fact. What convinced these men and women that He had risen was His concrete encounters with them as the Living One. Their close encounters with Him had a place and a date concerning which many, living witnesses could testify when and how these incidents took place. (Cf. I Cor. 15:5-8.)

*Lo, I have told you.* This solemn observation means that the angel's mission is completed so far as the women were concerned. Now, they must rise to obedience to their mission. Rather than take away man's initiative or responsibility, angelic messages increase it. To doubt the authenticity of his message would not be merely foolish but sinful. (Cf. Luke 1:19; Heb. 2:2.)

**28:8 And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word.** In obedience to the divine message, "they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8; contrast Matt. 9:31; Mark 1:45). Genuinely shaken by the angelic encounter, they fled from the scene of an event emotionally overpowering for them. Afraid to disobey the messenger of God, they paused to talk to no one until they could relay the good news to the disciples. Otherwise, they might have shouted the glorious news to everyone they met, despite Jesus' desire that this news not be proclaimed officially until Pentecost under the leadership of the

Holy Spirit (Luke 24:47-49). *With fear and great joy* is the paradoxical but psychologically real mixture of emotions felt by people who hear something too good to be true. "Can it be completely believed? And yet, if God's angel has told us, it must be true!" Although these women have stood in the majestic presence of the supernatural, they have heard the supremely joyous news that Jesus is no longer dead but gloriously alive and victorious! (Cf. Ps. 2:11.)

The women *ran to bring his disciples word*, their flying feet expressing their obedient love. Eagerly, they completed their responsibility, although their enthusiastic message was disbelieved (Mark 16:13; Luke 24:10f., 24f.).

Contrary to the view of those who place all resurrection appearances in Galilee, the women immediately found the disciples present in Jerusalem. There is no indication that they had fled home to Galilee or that the women had to run clear to Galilee to announce Jesus' resurrection. Rather, their message is that Jesus would go before them into Galilee, clearly implying that they to whom the message is sent are not in Galilee, i.e., yet in Judea. Many resurrection appearances to the disciples in the Jerusalem area are recorded as occurring on the same day as the resurrection itself. Without some previous arrangement or without adequately convincing motivation, the scattering of despondent apostles excludes their all gathering by chance on a mountain in Galilee.

#### The irrefutable fact demonstrated

28:9 **And behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and took hold of his feet, and worshipped him.** Matthew does not state nor imply that Jesus appeared to them the instant they left the tomb, but merely at some unstated time after they had left it. Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, then, shortly thereafter, to these women (Mark 16:9; John 20:11ff.). They were on their way to obey the divine message when *Jesus met them*. The Second Coming shall take place precisely like this appearance: in the midst of duty we shall be surprised by His coming. (Cf. 24:36—25:13.) Although in comparison to the Hebrew greeting, "Peace be to you" (John 20:21, 26), the Greek communicates the happy nuance, "Rejoice," His quite ordinary greeting, *All hail (chairete)*, simply means, "Hello, everyone" or "Greetings, everybody." (Cf. 26:49; Acts 15:23; 23:26; II Cor. 13:11 "Good-by"; James 1:1; II John 10f.)

That Jesus should appear first to the women disciples, rather than to the men, is peculiarly fitting, because of their love. The disciples did not approach the cross nor take care of Jesus' body either before or after the entombment. Their fear, despondency, shock, left them immobile, while these loving women overcame their hurt and did what had to be done each time. The men could also have been given this reward of love, but only the women put themselves in a position to receive it. There is mercy with the Lord: these women were wrong not to believe His promise, and foolish to bring spices to embalm Him, but He forgave their blunder, and appeared to them anyway. All that they had admired in Him before now stands before them alive. Deeper awe and adoration are appropriately due Him, because He has qualified Himself as worthy of worship. (Cf. John 5:23.) They recognize that resurrection has altered the former relationship: they are beings unworthy of His presence. (Cf. Judg. 6:22f.; 13:21f.; Luke 5:8.) He is their exalted Lord and offer Him their hearts' adoration.

Perhaps they also desired to touch Him to assure themselves that He is the same Jesus they had known, loved and followed so long, once dead, but now very physically alive. The Good News was not that His sepulcher was found empty by unimpeachable witnesses. This circumstantial evidence supports the resurrection story, but is not the central truth. It was the personal knowledge of numerous, competent witnesses that Jesus had really died and was buried, but was later verified to be alive from the dead by many personal contacts with Him. These direct, tangible proofs demolish the charges that the early disciples were overly credulous, victims of auto-suggestion, mistaken identity and tense nerves. Here die the theories of mystical, psychic apparitions or fleeting glimpses of the risen Christ. These disciples were then present and debated these questions themselves and answered them. What they saw and personally touched led them to an absolutely unshakable conviction of His triumph over death. Consequently, one cannot resist their evidences today without himself becoming irrational. (Cf. Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-29; Acts 2:32f.; 4:20; 5:32; I John 1:1-3.)

Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene before He met the other women (Mark 16:9; Matt. 28:9). Some feel that, because she was sent on ahead of these women to bring the disciples the glad word (John 20:17ff.), by Jesus' delaying them here they were permitted to hug His feet and she not. This unnecessarily imputes partiality to Jesus.

Although He forbade Mary Magdalene to cling to Him, Jesus permitted these women to *take hold of his feet*. (John: *mé mou hàptou*; Matthew: *ekràtêsan autoû tous pòdas*) It would appear that the difference does not lie so much in the Greek words, as in the attitude of the women themselves. Mary gripped Jesus with a determination driven by desperation not to lose Him again. (Cf. Mark 5:18ff.; Luke 8:38ff.) But, by so doing, she also hindered Him from doing and being what, in His new state of being, must now become normal for Him. "She cannot keep Him on earth any more—she must prepare herself for His return to Heaven" (Butler, *Luke*, 581). In fact, all the disciples must dismiss from their minds the hope that everything would return to the unbroken fellowship of the past months. His mission was not yet complete without His return to Heaven. The loving embrace of His feet by the women is essentially the same act as that of Mary, but it is differently motivated, for she lovingly wanted to keep Him forever. They, however, *worshipped him*, letting Him be God, autonomous of their wishes, desires or will for Him. This same distinction still separates appropriateness from selfishness in discipleship today.

*They came . . . and worshipped him.* (Cf. 28:17). The disciples' spontaneous adoration of the risen Lord on that first day of the week became the joyfully accepted reason for regular celebration of Jesus' resurrection by the early Church. (Cf. Ignatius: *Magnesians* 9; Barnabas 15:8f.; Justin Martyr, *Apology*, I,67:1-3,7; *Dialogue*, 41:4; Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2.) What would happen to the modern Church, if the first day of every week should once again produce the resurrection impact on us that it did on those early disciples?

**28:10 Then saith Jesus unto them, Fear not: go tell my brethren that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me.** Because of Jesus' victory over man's ancient, final enemy, death, this brief reassurance would mean so much more. His dispirited disciples can now live under constant tension of threats and intimidation, possibly ending up crucified or hideously butchered (10:26-33). But they shall overcome, not by wishful thinking or philosophical optimism, but with unshakable confidence in His resurrection power that gave them inexpressible joy full of glory.

With all His old gentleness, He showed Himself to be a Brother for the defeated and discouraged: *Go tell my brethren.* Who are these *brethren*?

1. Jesus' own kin, His half brothers, James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (13:55)? He did not consider their being less open to His message and ministry earlier (John 7:5) a hindrance to His appearing to James (I Cor. 15:7). He undoubtedly knew that appearance to them would determine their commitments to His program. James would become the great leader in the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15:13; Gal. 1:19) and Judas would pen the New Testament epistle bearing his name (Jude).
2. Jesus used this heart-warming term to identify Himself to His disciples as their Brother (John 20:17; Matt. 12:49; Acts 1:15; Rom. 8:16f., 29; Heb. 2:11-18). This view does not exclude the former, because the result of a message to His physical brothers would confirm their discipleship. He has just proven Himself Son of God, gloriously victorious over death, and yet He graciously elevated these unworthy earthlings to be His *brethren!* Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 992f.) notes that Jesus did NOT say:

“those habitual quarrelers . . . who promised to remain loyal to me no matter what would happen, but who when the crisis arrived left me and fled; . . . who, with one exception, were not even present at Calvary when I was laying down my life for them.” None of that. Instead, “my brothers,” those whom I acknowledge as members of my family, those who share the inheritance with me, those whom I love.

This warm human tenderness, so characteristic of Jesus, evaporated the women's nervousness and made them confident that He really is the same kind Master they had always known and loved. (Cf. John 15:14f.)

*That they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me.* Did Jesus intend that the disciples depart immediately? Apparently not, because John records two appearances in the Jerusalem area, one of which occurred a week later than this command (John 20:19ff., 26ff.). Nothing is said here about His not intending to see anyone in Jerusalem. He simply arranged to meet them in Galilee and He did so. Even so, why does Jesus tell the women to remind the disciples to depart for Galilee, when He could do it Himself at these two appearances?

1. In line with His original, heartening prophecy (26:32), Jesus Himself reminds them that He has kept His word about his resurrection. This bracing reminder begins drawing them out of their despondency even before He appears to them the first time there in Jerusalem.

2. Jesus is better than His word. Even if they were to expect to see Him in Galilee on the basis of the prophecy and its repetition here, He would graciously grant them a number of appearances even before that long-awaited happy reunion in Galilee.
3. The message is intended not merely for the Eleven or a few women, but for all His disciples or brethren. Even if He showed Himself alive to a few limited groups or individuals in Jerusalem, these appearances laid vital groundwork for appearances to His larger congregation in Galilee.
4. Once the feast was over, the greatest issue for these Galilean disciples might well have been the debate whether to return to Galilee at all. For them the question may have been their loss of face at home. For it was in Galilee, among their own kindred and acquaintances among whom they had evangelized widely in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, that they could imagine themselves most disgraced by the scandal of the cross. But Jesus must order them to return to that very province to face those very people, no longer ashamed, but aflame with a new passion that finds its only adequate explanation in the power of the risen Lord.
5. Jesus must insist on their going to Galilee, since it would be emotionally difficult for them to wrench themselves away from the precious scenes where their Lord had appeared to them. The same impulse to be near Him that drove the women to embrace the risen Lord would inspire them all to want to remain in the Jerusalem area.

Why give these first supernatural revelations and appearances to the women and not the eleven, even Peter and John? These women braved danger to be near Jesus' cross, follow His body to the tomb, return faithfully to anoint it with spices. Was this a form of special appreciation for their loyalty and love? (See on 28:9.)

On the other hand, God has always been using this method. In the face of masculine prejudice against the testimony of "a few excited women who tell tales of a reputed resurrection," God chose to utilize the weak things of the world to confound the mighty (I Cor. 1:27ff.). Whoever thought that a Lamb could overcome the great beasts of the world led by a dragon? Or that a small stone, hewn without human hands, could smash the colossal statue and grow into a mighty mountain that fills the whole earth (Dan. 2)? Or that in place of great, terrible beasts world dominion could be given to one like a mere son of man (Dan. 7)? Or that the first harbingers of the resurrection story could be *female*?! Not hardly what serious scholars, critical analysts

or scientific observers would have expected, but it is very much in harmony with the style of God. (See fuller notes on 21:16.)

For further study of the evidences of Jesus' resurrection, see Seth Wilson, *Learning From Jesus*, 508ff.; Paul Butler, *Luke*, 592ff.; *John*, II,463.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Define the time of day involved in the expression, "Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week."
2. Show how Matthew's account of the arrival of the women at the tomb harmonizes with that of the other Gospels.
3. List all the women who went to the tomb, as named in all the Gospels.
4. Describe the arrival of the angel, what he did and what occurred at the time of his coming.
5. What was the reaction of the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb?
6. Quote the message of the angel to the women.
7. The angel affirmed, "He has risen." When did Jesus rise?
8. On what earlier occasions had Jesus predicted His resurrection, to which the angel could now point in confirmation?
9. Cite the message the women were to carry to the disciples.
10. Which of the women was not at the tomb when the angel spoke to the others?
11. What did the angel invite the women to do to satisfy themselves that Jesus had indeed arisen? What special value would this invitation have for them?
12. What was the women's reaction to their experience with the angel at the open, empty tomb?
13. On what mission did the angel send the women?
14. What amazing event briefly interrupted the women's carrying out their mission?
15. What was their reaction to this interruption?
16. What were they to do after this interruption?
17. Defend or deny: "The brethren of Jesus are His disciples."
18. List the prophecy(ies) that were fulfilled when Jesus arose. Do not limit your list of spokesmen for God to the Old Testament prophets.

SECTION 77

JESUS' GUARDS TESTIFY TO HIS RESURRECTION

TEXT: 28:11-15

11 Now while they were going, behold, some of the guards came into the city, and told unto the chief priests all the things that were come to pass. 12 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave much money unto the soldiers, 13 saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. 14 And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and rid you of care. 15 So they took the money, and did as they were taught; and this saying was spread abroad among the Jews, *and continueth* until this day.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Is there any evidence in the text that the soldiers fled from the tomb in terror, once they overcame their initial fright? In what sense is it true that "some of the watch went into the city and reported to the chief priests"?
- b. Why did the soldiers report to the chief priests and not directly to Pilate? Are these not Roman soldiers?
- c. What do you think the soldiers actually reported? If you had to write the script for their report to the authorities, how would you word it?
- d. Why would the chief priests need to consult with other authorities?
- e. If the authorities were certain Jesus could not rise from the dead, why did they bribe the soldiers to tell a fabricated story? Why not present the evidence to prove Jesus was still dead, without all this difficulty?
- f. Do you think the authorities, upon hearing the soldiers' report, recognized that they were defeated? What does their reaction reveal about their character?
- g. Why do you suppose the soldiers had to be bribed? Were they black-mailing the Jewish authorities?
- h. Why would the governor be concerned that some of his men had slept on guard duty?
- i. Is it not blatantly inconsistent to affirm a fact purportedly observed while asleep? If so, in what way(s) would the soldiers spread the rumor that the disciples stole the body while they slept?

- j. The disciples disbelieved the eyewitnesses who testified that Jesus had risen. How does this disbelief prove that they could not have perpetrated a resurrection hoax?

### PARAPHRASE

The women had started on their way, when some of the guards went into the city to report to the religious authorities everything that had happened. After these latter held a meeting with the elders, and discussed the matter, they gave a substantial bribe to the soldiers with these instructions: "Tell people, 'His disciples came during the night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' Should the governor hear about his, we will convince him and you will have nothing to worry about."

So the soldiers accepted the money and carried out their instructions. Furthermore, this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to the present day.

### SUMMARY

After the departure of the women and perhaps also of the angels, the guards find their courage and report to the Jewish authorities for instructions. The hierarchy and civil officials prefer to hush up this damaging news by bribery and dishonesty. Jesus' disciples are to be blamed for stealing the corpse, while the guard slept. Further, the authorities promised to persuade the governor too, should the guards run into difficulties because of their story. At the writing of Matthew's Gospel this report was still circulating throughout Judaism.

### NOTES

#### Truth Suppressed by Wickedness

**28:11** Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city, and told unto the chief priests all the things that were come to pass. It would appear that, contemporaneous with the women's second departure on their mission, part of the guard arrived in the city. Although the exact timing of the women's arrival and departure is not indicated with relation to that of the men's, there is no need to believe that the women did not also

see the stunned soldiers still at the tomb. Matthew's silence about the presence of the guard while the angel talked with the women is no proof the soldiers were not there. In this case, the soldiers may have heard the angelic message to the women and this would become part of their deeply disconcerting report to the Jewish officials. The stupefied soldiers possibly got hold of themselves when the angel and the women disappeared. So, *while they were going*, the guards perhaps hastily evaluated their own alternatives.

1. All could remain at the tomb until relieved from duty by further orders. But, if the tomb is empty, there is no further purpose to guard it.
2. All the men could abandon their post. In a shameful display of unmilitary conduct some could scatter in fear, while only *some of the guard* had the courage to report to the authorities.
3. While some men remained on duty until relieved, *some of the guard* could leave the tomb to report and update the status of their mission.

Apparently, they chose the third option, because, if they all abandoned the tomb, they would *all have gone into the city*, since their barracks lay inside the city at the Castle Antonia, and not *some of them (tines)*, as Matthew affirms. So, while the women perhaps took one route to find the lodgings of Peter, John and the other disciples, the soldiers took the most direct route to the house of Caiaphas.

That Roman guards reported to Jewish *chief priests* is not surprising, because they were granted by Pilate to the Jewish authorities for temporary service (26:65f.). Further, the very character of their report required that these supernatural events be reported to those most qualified to interpret them and give counsel. To have reported them to the Roman officers would have been to invite unmitigated humiliation, but to go to the Jews meant receiving information and counsel in the explosive situation. Further, had they rashly broadcast the news that Jesus was risen, this testimony could have meant their death too, since to testify to that fact which they were supposed to prevent, would expose them to the unjustified wrath of those most determined to keep it from happening. So, they desperately needed to get advice from the Jews.

What would these unwilling witnesses have reported? Their humiliating shock in the presence of one superterrestrial being? Were they fully conscious, even if immobile, to stare helplessly while the angel

rolled away the stone and sat on it? Were they in a position to see inside the tomb, hence to testify to the fact that it was empty, even though no one had disturbed it or them before that first terrible fright? Did they hear the angel's confident announcement to the women: "He is not here! He is risen as He said! Come see the place where He lay!"? Was this message relayed to the Jews? The fact remained that the seal was broken, the stone rolled away, the tomb was empty, its temporary Tenant gone.

### The Pious Pay-Off

**28:12 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave much money unto the soldiers.** The emergency assembly thus convoked brought together the ruling body of Israel, present in its constituent members. It matters little whether it was called as an official session of the Sanhedrin or not, for these official advisors are not acting as private citizens, but as Israel's spiritual heads. There is no backing out now. They were all too deeply implicated in this supremely crucial question, and so must decide their future course together. The choice which lay before them was either to admit the obvious or to maintain their dignity only by the most preposterous lie.

Here is invincible blindness: they received the unimpeachable testimony of soldiers who honestly reported undeniable, supernatural events. Punishing the guard was never even discussed: their story was irresistibly convincing. How could they escape the undeniable conclusion that, if what the soldiers testify is true, the Sanhedrin and priesthood of Israel have been soundly defeated? They had done everything humanly possible to insure the absolute certainty of the Nazarene's death. Now they could not claim that He had merely fainted or that, after recovering in the tomb, He managed to escape alone. Their own disbelief excluded the hypothesis of a break-out from within the tomb. The testimony of armed guards among the best disciplined in the world excluded a break-in from without. By all their precautions, they had defeated themselves. They all knew that Jesus had threatened to rise from the dead on the third day (27:63ff.). Incredibly, the authorities persist in denying the possibility that Jesus' highest claims were true.

The authorities were immobilized into inaction, because they knew that producing a fraudulent corpse would be disastrous. The usually

shrewd Caiaphas and his crew could not pass off a mauled, decaying body of just anyone recently dead in place of the executed Nazarene. Such a contrived rebuttal must backfire, because not all of the soldiers had left the tomb over which the Jews themselves had set them. They could easily identify its location and could publicly swear that this tomb previously occupied by only one body was now empty. There could not be the confusion of disciples who might have gone to the wrong tomb and lied about a resurrection, since the enemies knew the correct one and guarded it. The mental paralysis and failure of Caiaphas and his holy brethren demands explanation: they could find no reasonable solution to their dilemma, because they knew that something had really happened at that tomb that spelled disaster for them. Aside from understandable fear that someone would talk, they were forced to concede that what they feared was true.

*They gave much money unto the soldiers.* These pious men thoroughly grasped the magic influence of money to shut mouths. But the pay-off must be generous, if the Romans must testify to a lie which could cost them their lives. That men as notoriously covetous as Annas would spare no cost to gain their point gauges how determined they were that the soldiers' testimony be heard by no other ear. The Man who had cost them initially only thirty pieces of silver is beginning to cost them much, much more.

Where could Christians have learned about this secret corruption of the guards? Everyone learned what the guards were to say, but who could have leaked the news of the corruption itself? From inside the Sanhedrin from Nicodemus or perhaps Josephus of Arimathea? From some of the priests converted later (Acts 6:7)?

### The Official Account

28:13 saying, **Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.** The authorities must openly admit that the absence of the body is a fact requiring public explanation. A quick examination of the tomb could verify this. But the empty tomb alone does not prove that Jesus emerged from it alive. It is merely circumstantial evidence of a fact, if it can be proved to be a fact on some other basis, as by His presenting Himself alive to competent witnesses. His foes recognized that an empty tomb has another possible interpretation: the body was hauled out dead. So, a face-saving statement could yet be worded so as to counter the damaging report

of a resurrection. The Romans must never again tell the story they had just reported. The only viable solution open to those hardened men living with the concrete realities was to accuse the disciples unjustly of a theft that everyone on the inside knew could not have taken place.

However, the resulting, well-financed lie is blatantly self-contradictory. It reveals more than it conceals:

1. The soldiers would be testifying to a fact that required their own death, "*we slept* on guard duty." But they were obviously not going to suffer punishment for it, or they would not admit it.
2. The soldiers must swear to a fact supposedly observed while the observers themselves were asleep: they positively identify the transgressors of the tomb as none other than *His disciples*. If they recognized them, why did they not stop them? If they slept, how could they recognize them?
3. The disciples showed no readiness to rescue Jesus from death. They had not expected His death, much less now His resurrection (John 20:9; Luke 24:6, 25f.). Every available indication shows that the disciples knew nothing of the seal or the guards at the tomb and learned of these precautions only after the resurrection. Like Jesus, their Teacher, these men were too honest even to think in terms of molesting the tomb or perpetrating a hoax. Then, when they were notified that the resurrection had actually occurred, they continued to demonstrate their inability to invent the resurrection story, by stubbornly disbelieving the witness (Mark 16:11; Luke 24:11). So far from being visionaries ready to believe any convenient story, their dissatisfaction with numerous, competent witnesses proved them far too skeptical to be psychologically capable of that of which they are accused. Although the Jews could not know this, the modern critics can, if they will.
4. The soldiers could be believed, if they told of their being overpowered by a force superior to their own. But who would believe that they were overwhelmed by an inferior number of unarmed, discouraged men?
5. But even had they dared, the logistics of moving the body from the tomb without detection by even one of the many supposedly sleeping guards is also highly improbable. The night was illuminated by a full Paschal moon and moving a heavy stone door away from the tomb in absolute silence on a still night is virtually impossible. Further, they risked detection by anyone among the thousands of Passover pilgrims encamped all around Jerusalem.

6. Everything about the tomb's interior bespoke calm and order: had men stolen the body, they would not have calmly removed the burial garments and folded them (John 20:5-7). The success of such an operation depended upon speed and stealth. Anything that compromises either must be rigorously eliminated, and yet there lay those perfumed wrappings and the face-cloth, evidence inconsistent with the theory of a hurried theft.

### The Insurance Coverage

28:14 **And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and rid you of care.** The eventuality of a military inquest defines these soldiers as Romans, since Jewish guards could have no fear of a military punishment from the Roman *governor*. Sleeping on guard duty was punishable by death, but *everyone knew that these men had not slept*. Their only fault is that they witnessed a politically embarrassing fact. So, should a judicial investigation be made into the soldiers' story, the Jews promised their influence: *We will persuade him*, a promise that communicated more than would be diplomatic to reveal: the only penalty to pay would be another handsome bribe or some dark political threat for Pilate. Corruption through bribery was the standard operating procedure to achieve political power in Palestine (*Ant.*, XVIII,6,5; XX,6,1; 8,9; 9,2; Acts 24:26). However, as Bruce (*Exp. Gr. T.*, I,338) suggests: "Of course they might take the money and go away laughing at the donors, meaning to tell their general the truth. Could the priests expect anything else? If not, could they propose the story seriously? The story has its difficulties." Their dilemma consisted in the impossibility of inventing a plausible story that could stand up against undeniable truth.

### The Snow Job

28:15 **So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying was spread abroad among the Jews, and continueth until this day.** Because the soldiers' orders had come from the Jews, they could risk admitting whatever their Jewish superiors wanted published. If they are satisfied, then everyone is satisfied. Matthew does not affirm that the soldiers actively spread the rumor. The soldiers simply *did as they were taught*, while *this saying* made the rounds throughout Judaism.

*This saying was spread abroad among the Jews, and continueth until this day.* Aside from the expression, "King of the Jews," this

is the only time Matthew, himself a Jew, uses the expression *the Jews*. Squarely facing the prejudiced unbelief circulating among his readers and dealing with it, of all places, *even in his next to last paragraph*, he defused it. Jewish readers could reason thus: "If the author of this testimony were trying to deceive the gullible in Judaism, he would not have dared reveal the origin of this absurd rumor and the facts which explode it. Too many would yet be able to disprove his thesis." Further, even decades after this event, any Jew could know what Matthew affirms: opponents of Christ's resurrection had still turned up no more convincing explanation of the phenomena than the soldiers' tale.

Naturally, this section has come under attack from anti-supernaturalists. The attack objects that the Jewish attempt at a rebuttal of the resurrection is so flimsy that men so astute as the Sanhedrinists could not have originated it nor the soldiers propagated it. Farrar (*Life*, 664, note 1) exposes their inconsistency:

Those who are shocked at this suggested possibility of deceit on the part of a few hard, worldly and infatuated Sanhedrists, do not shrink from insinuating that the faith of Christendom was founded on most facile and reprehensible credulity, almost amounting to conscious deception, by men who died for the truth of what they asserted, and who have taught the spirit of truthfulness as a primary duty of the religion which they preached.

Granted, the false report was a clumsy expedient. But, under the circumstances, what better solution could have occurred to the best minds among Israel's leadership? He who would criticize as illogical the story Matthew attributes to them and discount his report as unauthentic, must furnish a more rational alternative to their best efforts. They were baffled (1) by the fearless, precise, unassailable evidence given by courageous witnesses, and (2) by their own incompetence to explain the undoubted absence of the body from the empty tomb or to produce the corpse as undeniable evidence of the disciples' supposed fraud. Naturally, they would admit no more than absolutely necessary, but some plausible interpretation of the facts must be circulated to reduce the damage to a minimum. They could do no less than admit the absence of the body. The authorities' only solution was brazenly to lie in harmony with their rationalistic evaluation of the risk they faced (27:64). The authorities arrested the early Christians for propagating the resurrection of Christ, but they never

accused them of theft of the body, showing how little they believed their own story. May we not imagine the spies of Annas and Caiaphas surreptitiously listening in on everyone's conversation for some clue to the whereabouts of the Galilean's corpse, or out wildly combing the hillsides and caves of Palestine, searching desperately for any evidence of a recent burial?

Unfortunately, *This saying . . . continueth until this day* provides no direct clue to the writing of Matthew's Gospel, since Justin Martyr (165) reported the continuance of this calumny till his time (*Dialogue With Trypho*, 108,2). In fact, Justin charged that the Jews aggressively sought to check the powerful influence of the resurrection Gospel by propagating this calumny by means of special couriers sent all over the Jewish world. Unable to dispel the power of the facts, these disbelievers settled on a legend which would hide from their descendants what they themselves could not deny was the truth.

But that Matthew alone, of all the Evangelists, reported the Jews' efforts is adequately explained by these factors:

1. Matthew addressed his Gospel to the Hebrew reader, so needed to meet this issue head-on.
2. Other Gospel writers, precisely because Matthew reported it, needed not give this even more publicity, when they too had so much more to tell.

But this passage furnishes another unexpected evidence of the Gospel's truthfulness. Matthew knew that one is known not merely by the friends he keeps, but also by the quality of his enemies. The Jewish lie must stand throughout history side by side with the life-transforming message, the heroic martyrdom, the conscientiousness and morality of these same disciples. The result of the comparison leaves no doubt as to the sincerity, dedication and ethics of the Christians as compared with the best efforts of their detractors to conceive some plausible alternative explanation of the fact everyone admitted: the empty tomb. Further, the disciples did not foster the gradual spread of a vague rumor. Rather, by their fearless proclamation of the risen Christ right in the heart of world Judaism, these eye-witnesses launched their pointed public testimony in the teeth of a vicious storm of persecutions, privations and death. If the enemies desired to demolish the data on which the Christian preaching was based, they could desire no greater or fuller opportunity.

Matthew's testimony also removes the suspicion that Jesus' body was secreted away by some of His enemies. Otherwise, when the early Christians began to shake Judaism to the core by making thousands of believers in the risen Christ, the rulers would have mercilessly exposed the hoax by simply producing the badly decomposed body themselves. That they did not means they could not.

Together with its companion passage (27:62ff.), this section stresses just how much the whole Passion was under the direction of an omnipotent God whose plans could not be frustrated by the most careful planning of rebellious men bent on having their own way. This realization prepares the mind to accept Jesus' universal authority and the Great Commission (28:18f.; cf. 10:28). Turning his attention away from unbelieving Israel that had despised its true King, in harmony with his Apostolic commission (cf. Acts 13:46), Matthew turns to the Gentiles (28:18-20). Further, by showing that God permitted the resurrection's first messengers to be the enemies' own witnesses whose report was never questioned as completely true, Matthew underlines the fact that intellectual knowledge of the greatest fact in the world is insufficient to produce saving faith. Rather, one's heart must be that of a disciple, open to God, willing to be taught, before faith can lead to salvation. (Cf. 13:18-23; esp. Luke 8:15.)

By reflection on the superficialness and absurdities involved in this story which is included as a model of what skeptics are capable, Matthew's readers are emboldened to face with intelligence, skill and courage all other rationalizing attempts to explain the empty tomb.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. State the reaction of the guards when they returned to their senses.
2. To what specific authority did the soldiers report?
3. Why report specifically to them?
4. What was the immediate reaction of this authority?
5. What was the strategem chosen by the authorities to deal with the new crisis?
6. Explain why people hostile to Jesus invented nothing more plausible than the strategem on which their council finally settled.
7. Did this strategem work? If so, to what extent? If not, to what extent did it fail?
8. List the facts that demonstrate the absurdity of the strategem.

SECTION 78

JESUS COMMISSIONS HIS DISCIPLES  
TO WORLD EVANGELISM

TEXT: 28:16-20

16 But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. 17 And when they saw him, they worshipped *him*; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying. All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; 20 teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. When so many appearances of Jesus occurred in the Jerusalem area, why is this appearance in Galilee so important as to deserve such special notice to the seeming exclusion of all those others?
- b. Why was it so important for Jesus to order the disciples to return to Galilee and go to a specific mountain?
- c. If Jesus had already appeared a number of times, how do you explain the fact that "when they saw Him . . . some doubted" even yet? Who do you think worshipped Him and who doubted?
- d. Do you not think that Matthew is risking the loss of credibility to insert this compromising phrase, "but some doubted"? Give just one good reason why anyone may believe Matthew, *precisely because he included it*, and for which one could doubt his integrity, had he *not* done so.
- e. Why do you think Matthew reported so few appearances of Jesus risen from the dead? Was he unaware of, or critical of, other reported appearances?
- f. Why do you think it was important for Jesus to claim universal authority before ordering His disciples to disciple all the nations?
- g. Do you see any evidence here to sustain the common assertion that "we are ordered to win the world to Christ"?
- h. As opposed to a thousand other worthy goals or responsibilities, how does the order to "make disciples" indicate the true mission of the Church?

- i. This commission is addressed to the eleven disciples present on the mountain in Galilee. Nevertheless, what evidence does Jesus give here that this commission was not limited to them, but is valid for the entire Church in all ages of its existence and is so fundamental that any congregation of the Church may judge its true success and importance to God by the degree to which it is fulfilling this order?
- j. What does baptism have to do with discipleship?
- k. What do you think Jesus intended to reveal to us by requiring baptism "in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"? What concept(s) is involved in this formulation? Some affirm that He did not intend to dictate "a baptismal formula." What do you think about this, and why?
- l. What does it mean to "teach them all things I have commanded you"?
- m. How does the solemn affirmation, that Jesus is now with us until the end of the world, express the true, fitting, final climax to the fundamental message of Matthew's Gospel?
- n. What does this assurance of Jesus' presence with us until the end of the world, intend to contribute (1) to the life of the church taken as a whole, and (2) to the encouragement of the individual Christian?
- o. What changes do you envision necessary in the life of your church to realize the full impact of Jesus' promise to be with us all?
- p. What personal steps do you see essential in your personal life to act on the promise Jesus made to be with you? Or does this promise mean little to you personally? What could you do, if you really believed it?
- q. How does Jesus' being with us until time's end reinforce His expectation that we baptize and be baptized? What connection, if any, is there between our baptism and His promised presence?
- r. If the Apostles were going to die before the end of the first century, in what real sense could Jesus be with them until the end of the Christian age? In what sense would His promise not refer to them alone?
- s. In what sense is it true that this Great Commission is actually a foregone conclusion for anyone who has been reading Matthew's Gospel carefully?
- t. Even though the Church would take up the torch also, Matthew especially mentioned the Eleven as the particular, primary early

recipients of this great commission? What impact on your soul does it make to realize that Jesus defied the whole, hell-bent world with a few humble Galileans, and won, and just keeps right on winning?

- v. Do you think the modern Church is carrying out the Great Commission? What parts are we doing? What needs reinforcement?

### PARAPHRASE

Now the eleven disciples set out for Galilee.

[Perhaps here is to be placed John's report of Jesus' appearance to the seven disciples fishing on Lake Galilee (John 21:1-23).]

They went to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him. However, some hesitated. As Jesus came up to them, He addressed them, "My Father has committed full authority in heaven and on earth to me. So, go make all nations my disciples, immersing the disciples into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to put into practice everything I have commanded you. Remember, I myself am with you every day—right down to the end of time!"

### SUMMARY

Matthew chose to conclude his Gospel with the appearance of Jesus on a Galilean mountain. Jesus' appearance produced two opposite results: worship or doubt. Nevertheless, He claimed universal authority from God, and so ordered the disciples to evangelize the world, baptize the believers and teach them obedience to the whole message of Jesus. He promised participation in this task down to the last day of the world.

### NOTES

#### Rendezvous in Galilee

**28:16 But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them.** The Twelve have now become *the eleven*. (Cf. Acts 1:25.) Notwithstanding the faithlessness of Judas, God's program marches on. (Cf. Rom. 3.3.)

Just when *the eleven disciples went into Galilee* is not indicated. However, it may be assumed that they observed what remained of the Feast of Unleavened Bread before returning home in *Galilee*. This would allow time for the appearance in Jerusalem (John 20:19, 26). Until this point Matthew left unrecorded the designation of *the mountain where Jesus had appointed them*. Calling it *the mountain* (*tô ôros*) does not prove it was a familiar spot, because Matthew designates other hills across the Jordan the same way (14:23; 15:29). The fact that *Jesus appointed them* (*etâxato*, "order, fix, determine, arrange") implies that the disciples really needed very express directions to go there, in the same way they required more than one reminder even to leave for Galilee (28:7, 10). It is likely that He indicated His choice during those appearances, a probability that presupposes that the appearances which Luke and John record truly occurred. In this case, we have another incidental confirmation of the Gospel narratives.

Because it was apparently Jesus' purpose not to show Himself alive to all men, "but to witnesses chosen before by God" (Acts 10:40f.), He could not set His appointment with them in some city of Galilee where hundreds of unbelievers could witness this appearance. Rather He must name some remoter location, distant from human habitation where this appearance could occur in privacy. Open fields on the plains would still be watched. Therefore, the strenuous effort to ascend a *mountain* would thin out the idly curious and furnish the desired privacy. Also, if only disciples knew the identity of *the mountain where Jesus had appointed them* and not improbably also the day and hour, then only disciples would converge on the spot.

Jésus knew that from the elevation of a *mountain* the disciples could gaze over Galilee where their first dreams of the Kingdom of God had been formed. There, in His discipleship, their fledgling efforts in His service had been expended. Now He must challenge them to world conquest. This material vantage point offers the psychological advantage of reminding them of what was known, tested and proven in their own personal evangelistic experience, and aids their perception of their own part in world evangelism in the regions beyond. (See notes on 28:7, 10.)

### History's Greatest Watershed Issue

28:17 **And when they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.** Although many of these people had already seen Jesus

alive before, this appearance produced a powerful effect. This is not common, oriental obeisance, but a new reverence for Jesus as God. To worship the risen Lord is the natural, appropriate reaction of the believer. (Cf. 28:9.) How much more so now as the disciples, filled with awe and joy, are reunited once again with their victorious Lord in Galilee, just as He promised.

That *some doubted* would appear to question the validity of the evidence given that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. Or it could suggest that His previous appearances were finally unconvincing for some of the very eye-witnesses themselves. Despite the seeming adequacy of the proof of Jesus' victory over death given earlier, apparently competent people who were present and therefore able to give valid testimony, hesitated at the insufficiency of the so-called "evidences" that convinced other less critical (= more gullible) people. It would appear, therefore, that Matthew made an unfortunate misstep by including this damning admission on this critical, last page of his work.

One might conclude, therefore, that this phrase is to be dismissed as an ignorant blunder on Matthew's part. No sectarian apologist in his right mind, who intends to establish a conclusion regardless of the evidence, could afford to make the embarrassing admission that Matthew calmly sets down for posterity in precisely this setting where its effect would be devastating.

On the other hand, if it could be shown that we must judge our author at least normally intelligent, hence aware of, and responsible for, the long-term consequences of this phrase: *and some doubted*, then he is innocent of an inexplicable gaffe that spoils the efficacy of his argument, and with it that of his book. Conceivably, what at first glance seemed to be the most compromising remark of Matthew's entire Gospel, surprisingly supports his entire message with uncommon power. McGarvey (*Evidences*, II, 155f.) argued:

The very admission of this doubt is an indubitable mark of naturalness and truthfulness in the narrative; for it could certainly not have been thought of had it not been true; and even though true, it would have been omitted if the author had been more anxious to make the case a strong one than to tell it as it was.

Our only alternative at this point, then, is to judge Matthew so sure of the adequacy of the evidence that Jesus really arose, that no argument to the contrary based on this phrase could ever be raised. His

case is so solid that inclusion of this phrase could never even disturb it.

John confidently dared to admit that, as late as six months before the Last Week, some of the people closest to Jesus did not believe in Him (John 7:5). He boldly documented Thomas' refusal to believe (John 20:25). Mark and Luke admitted that the disciples did not believe the women's eyewitness testimony (Mark 16:11; Luke 24:11). Luke reported that the disciples, locked in a room with the risen Christ and, staring right at Him, "still disbelieved for joy and wondered" (Luke 24:41)!

Rather than doubt the evidence of the other writers, Matthew is so certain of his position, that he can afford to include even less evidence than other Gospel writers. This coincides with his style of apologetic begun with his account of the crucifixion. Just as he cited no Messianic prophecy to support the Messianic claims of Jesus, so now here, to support the truth of the resurrection, he cites only two appearances interspersed with the enemy's frantic efforts to nullify the powerful eloquence of the Empty Tomb. His technique again is "Not too little, not too much."

Granted the appropriateness of mentioning that *some doubted*, we must now ask how it was possible that people who, presumably, were already disciples, would or could continue to doubt at this critical moment, with which Matthew is going to close his book. Worse, how could they doubt, *when they saw him?* The demands of empirical evidences assume that "seeing is believing," but these see and continue to doubt!

1. Some consider it completely absurd that any of the eleven could doubt, after the convincing appearances in Jerusalem (Luke 24:33ff., John 20:19ff., 26ff.). There is hardly room for "some" who *doubted* in the small group of the Eleven. Therefore, those who *doubted*, even *when they saw him*, are held to be other people whose presence on this occasion was simply not mentioned. This event is held to be the appearance to the five hundred of which Paul speaks (Cf. I Cor. 15:6, a suggestion highly probable for these reasons:

- a. Jesus insisted that messages be sent to His followers to meet Him in Galilee (26:32; 28:7, 10). So, the reminders of this Galilean gathering were known not merely by the Eleven, but by the women who told them and potentially by many other

disciples as well. (Cf. "tell my *brothers* to go to Galilee." 28:10; Luke 24:9: "all the rest" as distinguished from the eleven.)

- b. Since the appearance was apparently the only one prearranged by Jesus' appointment, it facilitated the convocation of many more than the Eleven.
- c. Because after the ascension only 120 disciples gather in Jerusalem, it may be assumed that the larger group of 500 of whom Paul wrote, met Him earlier in Galilee.
- d. Even at Jerusalem, when the disciples are mentioned as key witnesses of His appearance, others besides the Apostles were present. (Cf. John 20:18-26; Luke 24:33.) If Jesus set the appointment during those appearances, these could know about it.

So in Galilee, it is possible that He approached and spoke to some disciples who had not yet seen Him (28:18). Even so, Matthew did not mention the 500, but centers all attention on the Eleven.

- 2. Some see this doubt as the psychological self-protection of *men who now truly wanted to believe*, but distrusted their own emotions' power to compromise their objectivity. So they continued to oppose the resurrection hypothesis until the overwhelming evidence of the facts so powerfully asserted itself that denial became not merely more unreasonable than belief, but unsustainable unless they would deny their own rationality. (Cf. Bruce, *Training*, 494f.) Such doubt expresses "mingled conflicting feelings of reverent recognition and hesitation as to the identity of the person played their part" (Bruce, *Exp. Gr. T.*, I,339). These men would take nothing for granted. Rather, motivated by a holy seriousness, they questioned whether this unusual experience might not have some other explanation. Lenski (*Matthew*, 1170) is undoubtedly right that the psychological and intellectual makeup of the apostolic group was heterogeneous: "the eleven were of different dispositions. Some were receptive, some slow to apprehend, of little faith, easily discouraged and troubled, unable to let go their old notions and to rise to the new spiritual heights." No wonder, then, that they doubted!
- 3. A fallacy lies in thinking that they saw Him *and continued to remain unconvinced during the entire discourse and even after this event*. Matthew's text does not so affirm. Rather, after the phrase in question, Matthew reports that, "Jesus came to them and spake unto them." From this McGarvey (*Evidences*, II,155) concludes that this

shows that at the moment of the doubt he was not very near to them and had not yet spoken to them. There is no difference, then, between the doubt on this occasion and on the first, when they thought for a time that he was a ghost.

- Even so, Matthew does not record their transformation into believers.
4. Another solution is to see that what they doubted was not whether Jesus were risen at all, but the identity of the One whom they now see. Awed, they had reason to doubt whether what they were seeing at first were really Jesus and not something or someone else. They could perhaps sense an alteration in His appearance: greater majesty, more evident glory. For whatever reason, some people had not recognized Him at first (John 20:14; Luke 24:16; Mark 16:12). He could appear and disappear at will, transcending physical limitations (Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:19, 26). Even though He manifested miraculous power during His earthly ministry, that surpassed the laws to which ordinary humans are subject, they could rightly wonder whether this Personage were the same humble, suffering Galilean with whom they had been so long acquainted.

Although Matthew wrote: *they doubted*, he did NOT say, "they disbelieved." The former questions; the latter affirms. Thus, it is possible to conclude that, by approaching and addressing them, Jesus gave them infallible evidence that dissipated their initial hesitation as to His identity and reality. The Apostles naturally would recognize Jesus instantly from their previous encounters with the risen Lord, and *worshipped Him*. The others, not being rushed even by the good example of others, wanted to verify their facts.

The unbelievable patience and justified confidence of Jesus led Him to address His Great Commission to those who doubted just as much as to those who believed. He knew that whatever questions remained would have answers in the grand days that followed: the Holy Spirit would come, they would experience His power in its fulness. So, He treated them even now with the same friendly courtesy, as future believers, believed the best of them, and made believers of them! What a lesson for us who demand that everyone have every doctrine straight before we treat them with courteous brotherliness!

Thus, as to the empirical reality of the fact, the hesitation of those who were slow to be persuaded is as precious as the worship of those already convinced. Their extreme prudence and refusal to be convinced except by the validity of the proof and their resultant, unshaken

certainty after their doubts were resolved by evidence, all prove conclusively that their proclamation of the risen Lord was not the result of self-deception, but because the concrete fact that Christ arose could not reasonably be disbelieved. (Cf. Luke 24:11, 22f., 36f.; John 20:8f., 24-31.) Their doubt is recorded so that we might not have a doubt (Bruce, *Training*, 479,482).

### The Universal Lordship of Jesus Christ

28:18 **And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth.** The formal introduction of what follows is reminiscent of the formulations that introduced great discourses like the Sermon on the Mount. (Cf. Matt. 5:1f.; 10:1, 5; 13:3; 18:2f.; 23:1f.) Rather than treat the reader to an extended sermon as in the former cases, the equally satisfying summary Matthew includes is a marvel of brevity and completeness, a fitting conclusion to Jesus' life and ministry on earth, a summary of His doctrine and of His program of world conquest. Even though the content is nothing less than the solemn outline of their duty, His manner is friendly and informal, (*elàlesen autois*), "he talked with them.")

Matthew's Gospel opened with the claim that Jesus was David's Son, hence truly Messianic King (1:1). Now it concludes with His far more glorious claim of unlimited sovereignty as King of the universe. The one leads inevitably to the other. Without formally citing Daniel 7:14, Jesus, "the Son of man" par excellence, majestically claims this cosmic authority with a naturalness that is appropriate only for One whose right it unquestionably is. Without yielding once to Satan's offers of world dominion (cf. 4:8ff.), He overcame and was rewarded with His own, rightful, true sovereignty. (Cf. Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:12; 14:9; Eph. 1:20ff.; Phil. 2:9ff.; Col. 1:18; 2:10; Heb. 1:6; I Peter 3:22; Rev. 5.)

*Hath been given* points to the Father as the source of His authority. (Cf. 11:27; I Peter 1:21; Rev. 2:27.) As the Word of God, He was equal with God (John 1:1; 17:5; Phil. 2:5). However, during His period of self-humiliation as a servant of God, as man, Jesus qualified Himself to receive the authority and responsibilities entrusted to Him. Thus the original plan of God for man shall be realized (Ps. 2; cf. Heb. 2:5-18; see notes on Matt. 21:16).

The Kingdom of God shall be given those uncompromising saints who, like their Lord, really defeat Satan's offers of "all the kingdoms

of this world" (Dan. 7). We can only do this in the measure we really acknowledge the transforming power and cosmic sovereignty of the risen Christ over our lives and problems. Little will be done to make believers, until disciples believe in that awesome authority and power whereby He is able to subject everything to His control. As long as our Omnipotent Christ is in control, we can never think our task impossible.

### The Universal Mission of the Church

28:19 **Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.** *Therefore*, i.e. on the basis of the unlimited power and awe-inspiring, universal authority of Jesus' Lordship, we may do anything He tells us because of His might to strengthen, defend and lead us in triumph (Phil. 4:13). Despite the staggering odds against us and although our lives and ministry be severely limited by the greatest obstacles and gravest dangers or even cut short by martyrdom, we may be confident that He shall make His gigantic undertaking to triumph and we shall reign with Him anyway. A universe under His boundless control cannot be out of order—no matter what happens.

*Go ye*: the Church must involve herself in aggressive warfare that ignores earth's national or cultural boundaries or else be fundamentally disobedient to a Lord who aims at ultimate, total control of the earth. Earlier, Israel's light in the world was less aggressive. God's people received men if they approached Israel. Now, however, this positive going to them to take Christ's message is a new element.

Merely because expressed as a participle, *Go ye (poreuthentes)* is no less a command. Since it is subordinate to a principal verb in the imperative mood (*matheteusate*), this renders it no less a command than that verb itself. (Cf. e.g. 28:7, [= 10]; Luke 19:5 in Greek.) Had Jesus desired to say, "as you go, preach," He could have expressed Himself differently, (*poreuomenoi kēryssete*, 10:7). The ASV is correct in rendering this participle and its main verb, *Go ye, and make disciples*. Often those who argue that the Greek means, "Having gone," as if it were not imperative, are not consistent in using the same logic or grammar with the other two participles in this commission: *baptizing (baptizontes)* and *teaching (didaskontes)*. Although these actions are admitted on all hands to be absolutely essential, the *going* is no less imperative than either of these. So, the

main point of this commission is to bring the message of life in Christ Jesus to all, not to wait to do so if and when we happen to go.

The early Christians did not automatically or naturally grasp the universality of the Gospel (Acts 10:18; 11:19). Because of their nationalistic prejudices, they took their time about evangelizing a different ethnic group or establishing the first racially integrated congregation (Acts 8-11). So, His command, *Go ye*, is not simply appropriate but imperative. Further, that this order was not limited exclusively to the Apostles is clear:

1. The early Christians understood it as applicable to the whole Church. (Cf. Acts 8:2, 4; 11:20.) This understanding may arise from the fact that many non-Apostles were present when Jesus gave this great mission. (Cf. Mark 16:13ff.; Luke 24:13, 33ff., 44-49 with John 20:19-21.) Since Jesus did not apply it exclusively to the Apostles, they could consider themselves responsible to carry out this commission within the limits of their gifts and opportunities.
2. It is implied in "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." What Jesus commanded the Apostles they loyally committed "to faithful men who would be able to teach others also." (Cf. II Tim. 2:2.) The Apostles told the Church what Jesus had told them: *Go ye and make disciples of all the nations*. And so the irrepressibly joyful song is taken up by new voices in new languages.
3. The Lord's vineyard and harvestfields are still plentiful (9:37f.) The field is still the world (13:38). All church members are non-professional missionaries who live in an area of the world that needs the gospel as truly as someone a thousand miles distant. The efforts of missionaries in other areas do not exclude, but rather require, those of Christians in the areas whence the former were sent forth.

For the final time, Matthew briefly highlights one of the sublimest themes of his book, expressed in the grand words of Jesus. Anyone who has been reading this Gospel closely could well suspect that, sooner or later, He whom Matthew presented as the truly Jewish Messiah interested in the salvation and blessing of Gentiles; not merely of Hebrews, would arrive at this point. (24:14; 26:13; cf. Special Study: "Gentiles" at close of this volume.) Consequently, the Great Commission is no new revelation but the well-prepared, foregone conclusion of everything Matthew has included to describe the purpose and direction of Jesus' life and ministry on earth.

Even so, this is neither the first time nor the last that Jesus would direct His followers to evangelize the earth (John 20:21ff.; Luke 24:48ff.; Mark 16:15ff.; Acts 1:4-8). It is highly significant that the Evangelists note on how many different occasions the risen Lord revealed His deepest concern by concentrating so much of His post-resurrection instruction on the disciples' aggressive campaign of witness before the world (Acts 1:1-9).

This King of the universe orders His subjects, not to conquer *all the nations*, but to *make disciples* of them. The goal of the Gospel is not to develop great philosophers, pious religionists, holy mystics or theological lawyers, but *disciples* who learn from Jesus, let Him teach them and submit to His Lordship. Because *disciples* are to be the product of the Church's efforts, Matthew has deliberately chosen to utilize this word, *disciples*, rather than "apostles" throughout his Gospel, to furnish the paradigms whereby the reader may grasp what discipleship implies. Even though the Twelve disciples became Apostles, no one must misunderstand that these great men whom we have come to respect highly for their work's sake were once common *disciples* with problems, ignorance, prejudices, conceit, frustrations and sins. But they were in love with Jesus, submitted to His leadership, committed to His Kingdom. Although they sometimes failed to understand Him, their unshakable commitment to Him and willingness to learn from Him brought them unerringly back on course. All of them risked flunking out of His school, but all of them but one let Him be the Teacher! This alone made the difference between the Pharisees and genuine students of Jesus, between sectarians and Christians, between camp followers and real learners, between the multitudes and these who fought back their fears, crying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68)! We are to make people believe that Jesus has all the truth and long with all their hearts to submit to the truth and remain in it (John 14:6; 8:31).

There are no exceptions: His gospel is directed not just to Israel, but to *all the nations*. Israel's exclusive privilege has ended (21:43). They are now but one of *the nations*. Consequently, Jesus' early restriction of the Apostles' ministry (10:5) is now completely countermanded. From this time on the Christians preached to every creature, "to the Jew first and also to the Greek," (Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:16; 2:9f.). But the Jews are to be admitted to the Kingdom, not because

of physical sonship to Abraham or by adherence to their cultural heritage, but by sincere discipleship to Jesus and salvation by faith in His grace (Acts 15; Gal. 2:11-21).

*All the nations* means Jesus demolished such divisive boundaries as culture, class, race, sex or wealth which formerly structured mankind (Gal. 3:28). There can be no untouchables or unlovables unworthy of an equal place in His Kingdom. Now the decisive question is: Is my neighbor a *disciple*? If not, he is a prospect for the Gospel. If so, he is mine to love as a "brother in Christ, a subject of the heavenly King, a member of a new race being formed from every kindred and tribe" (Tolbert, *Good News From Matthew*, 247). This is the spirit of God's intention for Abraham's grand family, that "in you and in your children shall *all the nations* of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). The Church's mission, therefore, is relevantly rooted in God's faithfulness in keeping His promise to Abraham!

### The Formal, Definitive Induction into the Kingdom

*Baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.* Jesus' command to "make disciples" requires that the only appropriate candidates among *the nations* for baptism be *disciples* of Jesus. They are not undisciplined peoples who have never enrolled in the school of Christ to learn from Him (11:28f.). Nor are they babes who cannot acknowledge His Lordship by believing (Mark 16:16; Acts 16:31) or by repentance (Acts 2:38). To suppose that infants can be inducted into the Kingdom by baptism has historically introduced into the Kingdom generations of people who were never *made disciples*. Similarly, formally correct baptism of unconverted adults continues to swell churches with pagans uncommitted to the Lordship of Jesus. The early Christians rightly thought that "making disciples" was the way people must be saved, and equivalent to conversion, the new birth, becoming Christians (Acts 14:21f.).

That literal immersion in water is the rite intended must be concluded from the consideration that His disciples were thoroughly familiar with John's literal baptizing in water (3:1ff.; John 3:22f.) and practiced it themselves (John 4:1ff.). When they heard Him order them to baptize, they would be immediately reminded of that immersion in water with which they were already accustomed, especially since He did not qualify His words otherwise. That they thus

understood His meaning, the uniform practice of the apostolic Church is convincing confirmation. (Cf. Acts 8:36-39.) That a baptism in the Spirit is not meant is proven by the consideration that when Jesus summarized the glorious mission His Church must undertake, it is most unlikely that He would insert a command expressed in language *symbolic* of something else when all else He said is to be understood *literally*. His command implies that His disciples administer the baptism in question, whereas Jesus Himself would be the administrator of baptism in the Holy Spirit (3:11; John 1:33; Acts 2:33).

Does Jesus hereby make *baptizing* essential to salvation (Titus 3:5; I Peter 3:21)? No more nor less than the belief and repentance that precede it (Acts 2:38). No more nor less than the discipleship requisite to it. No more nor less than His own death with which baptism identifies the penitent believer (Rom. 6: Col. 2:12). And no more nor less than the growth to maturity Jesus requires after baptism (20:20). But by ordering baptism, Jesus tests every man's discipleship as concretely as if He had ordered him to sacrifice his firstborn son or to build an ark or paint lamb's blood on the doorposts of his house. Even so, Staton (*The Servant's Call*, 50f.) warned that "to emphasize baptism to the neglect of 'making disciples' is to disobey the Great Commission. We are to baptize only repentant believers." If a person is quite content to run his own life, he has not acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus. He does not accept the meaning of belief and repentance.

For the Jewish reader, quite noticeable in this command required of *all nations* is the complete silence about circumcision or anything else belonging peculiarly to Judaism. This point was lost on too many Christians during the first two decades of the Church's life (Acts 15. Jerusalem council around 50 A.D.).

*Into the name*: "God is one and His Name one" (Zech. 14:9). He is not merely the God of Jews only but also of Gentiles (Rom. 3:29f.; 10:12). Immersion *into the name* is more than a formulary repetition of the divine Name over the candidates for entrance into the Kingdom. It is more than our acting as agents on His authority, "in the Name of the Almighty." Rather, *baptizing them into the name* objectively initiates them into a new relationship with the one God whose Name it is, a relationship of Owner and owned. Baptism becomes the moment when the believer is invested with the Name of his new Master to whom and into whose service he is now formally dedicated. If God

promised to meet with His people where His Name is named (cf. Exod. 20:24; Matt. 18:20), then it is no marvel that the Divine Name should be placed on every single believer (Rev. 3:12; 14:1; 22:4) and on the body of believers thus constituted to grow up into a holy temple in the Lord (I Cor. 3:16f.; 6:19f.; Eph. 2:20ff.; I Peter 2:5; Rev. 21:3).

Without officially naming the Trinity, Jesus implied the doctrine by placing each of the three Persons in a unified relationship into which the believer is baptized. Omitting all other beings, angels or men, He unites just these three. (Cf. other examples of this phenomenon: I Cor. 12:4-6; II Cor. 13:14; Eph. 1:3, 10, 13; 2:18-22; 3:14-17; 4:4-6; 5:19f.; II Thess. 2:13f.; Heb. 6:4-6; I Peter 1:2; I John 3:23f.; 4:2; Jude 20f.; Rev. 1:4f.) In so doing, He implied the essential deity and equality of each Person mentioned, hence also the high significance of the new relationship the believer sustains to each one. Expressions such as "baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" or "baptized into Christ" (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; Gal. 3:27) do not deny the Trinitarian formula, because Luke and Paul may not have intended to express the exact form of the baptismal formula used on those occasions. Rather, they affirm the believer's confession that, of all earth's spiritual leaders, only Jesus has Messianic authority to admit us into living fellowship with the Triune God (11:27; John 14:6).

### The Daily, Unfinished Task of the Church

**28:20 teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.** If the former commands express the evangelistic efforts of the Church whereby people are brought into the Kingdom, this latter expresses the edification of the saints whereby they are kept there. The believers, as disciples, must receive further instruction, not merely to recognize orthodox doctrine or adhere to a few formalities, but *to practice everything I commanded you*. (Cf. I Tim. 1:5; James 1:22f.; 2:8-26.) With the Lord, there can be no genuine Christianity that stops at mere mental mastery of material and does not also lead to lives transformed into the image of Christ, making us partakers of the divine nature (Eph. 4:11-15; II Peter 1:3-11). The test of discipleship is how much of Christ's word bears fruit in us (John 15:1-17), which is evidenced by our obedience (John 15:10, 14). Our rule of faith and practice must be:

1. *everything*; i.e., nothing omitted by convenience or neglect. (Cf. Acts 20:20, 27)
2. *I commanded*, clearly revealed truth, not human opinions or inferences (II Peter 3:2; I Cor. 14:37).
3. *you*, my witnesses, empowered by the Holy Spirit (John 15:26, 27; Acts 1:8; 10:41, 42); i.e. the Apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42; II Tim. 2:2; I Cor. 15:1ff.), not false revelations purporting to be inspired (II Thess. 2:2). Lest the Apostles forget something, He furnished them the divine Spirit to teach them all things and remind them of everything He had said to them (John 14:26).

What does it mean to *teach them everything I commanded you*?

1. His own centrality in all of God's revelations in the Hebrew Scriptures, His own universal authority expressed here.
2. His specific lessons that inform our minds.
  - a. Self-denial, cross-bearing.
  - b. The Kingdom, its goals, methods, values, future.
  - c. The disciple's relationship to others, humility, forgiving spirit, helpfulness.
  - d. The dangers of hypocrisy, pride, ambition, self-deception.
  - e. His emphases on the spiritual, as opposed to the material and political nature of His rule and Kingdom.
3. His great, precious promises to motivate us to become sharers in His divine nature.
4. His own marvelous example that shows us what righteousness means and how it is achieved. His entire life and ministry, death and resurrection are full of information about the mind of God and how human conduct can reflect it.
5. His commands that render specific His moral imperatives, His graciousness to make clear what it is He expects us to do.
6. His unequivocal confidence in the authority and validity of the Old Testament as well as the Christian's new relationship to its standards, examples, types, predictions, theological concepts, etc.
7. His validation of the authority of the Apostles and their ministry.
8. His driving sense of world mission to seek and save that which is lost.

This is but a poor, short summary. The mind of Christ is broader than this. But if we *observe all* that He commanded, we shall not simply have more of the Spirit of Christ, but more appropriately and significantly, the Lord shall have more of us! The clearest lesson

here is that selection of a few pet doctrines cannot substitute for loving absorption of the total mind, ministry, manners and morals of Christ.

### God with Us Forever

*And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* This heart-thrilling assurance aims to encourage His people to believe that they have power equal to their task in the age-long mission on which He sends them and that He personally and concretely guarantees this power with His presence. (Cf. Exod. 33:14f.; Josh. 1:5.) This heartening word to weak mortals burdened with the responsibility of discipling a lost world is but another way of saying, "I send you heavenly power, the Holy Spirit my Father promised," (Luke 24:49). Since these disciples had already labored in Galilee in Christ's absence (Matt. 10:1ff.; Cf. Luke 9:6, 10; 10:17ff.), they knew that the power He delivered to them was invincible. The visible presence of Christ was not to be expected because not absolutely essential to the victorious completion of their mission.

Matthew omits all mention of the ascension. Three considerations argue that his silence cannot be interpreted as a denial of Luke's clear affirmations that it occurred:

1. Even before promising them His presence with them, His command to go had already implied His absence during their efforts, unless somehow He could accompany each one personally. *His incarnation had limited Him to be one Man in one place.*
2. Unless He were to overcome the previous, self-imposed, spatial limits on His physical, even if glorious, body, how could He personally remain with *all the believers in all the world until the judgment?* But by dispensing with these limitations, He could be everywhere with all His people all the time. Although the ascension means so much more, it is nonetheless a highly feasible, appropriate way to facilitate this.
3. Matthew's special purpose was to picture Jesus as the Christ, ruling the Kingdom of God among His people. While His return to heaven could still accomplish this, Matthew desired that the last impression of the reader should be that of the heavenly Messianic King, Jesus Christ ruling on earth, living among His people. Matthew has created a magnificent effect by not reporting the ascension. The reader is left with the impression that life in the

Kingdom of God continues as if the Lord never departed. Rather, in the person of the Holy Spirit, Jesus would somehow take on omnipresence, so that each disciple, however far across the face of the earth he may go, might know Jesus' love and sympathy and bank on His vast reserves of heavenly might. Thus, any disciple may maintain the closest contact with His heavenly King.

So, even if it would be His eternal Spirit to accomplish this uninterrupted omnipresence, Matthew's report of His promise, by its nature, presupposes His absence and leaves room for the ascension, reported by his colleagues.

The grand significance of His Name, "Emmanuel" (1:23), with which Matthew's Gospel began and now ends, shall be realized: God is with us in the person and presence of the Spirit of Christ. Now it becomes clear how His presence could bless even the smallest possible gathering of the Church anywhere in the world in any age (18:20). Already the language of this cosmic Sovereign reflects the confidence of the eternal point of view where all tomorrows resolve into one endless now: *I am*. (Cf. John 8:58.)

*Always, even unto the end of the world:* the time-barrier has been broken. Jesus is Lord of the Christians, singularly and collectively, in every epoch until He pleases to call a halt to this age and start eternity rolling for us. Thus, the modern Christian, rather than lament his misfortune not to live in that great golden age when Jesus walked the dusty roads of Palestine, may rise to the challenge of the early Church who saw her risen Lord ascend into heaven, leaving them the power of His Spirit, rather than His physical presence. The early Christians adored Him, not as an admirable historical figure, but as their Eternal Contemporary who led them always, everywhere in triumph (II Cor. 2:14ff.).

Although the Apostles would not live *unto the end of the world*, because they would die before that moment arrived, yet His being with them promised them support, not only in their personal ministry but, especially by means of the Holy Spirit. He would give power and authority to their words, so that their words, whether oral or written, would become the touchstone by which all of the Church's future life would be judged. (See notes on 10:40; 19:28.)

Even though He gladdens our hearts by the warmth of His presence, the time-span between His departure and His return appears to lengthen as He guarantees His presence down to the end of an era that must seem unthinkable long for those whose Messianic expectations looked

for a rapid conclusion of the age. (Cf. John 21:22f.) Contrary to the misunderstandings of those who read this notion into Scripture, the concept of a distant Parousia was already taught (24:48; 25:5, 19; Luke 19:11).

After this, the disciples would return to Jerusalem for the Ascension in anticipation of the arrival of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:48-52; Acts 1:4—2:4). Matthew closes his Gospel before these latter events, not to diminish their importance or, worse, because he supposedly knew nothing about them, but to leave in the readers' mind the ringing challenge of world-wide evangelism in the Name and power of the Risen Lord, Jesus the Messiah. As he has done in so many episodes before. Matthew now terminates his entire book without relating what the people did when they first heard Jesus' divine mandate. The conscience of the reader is left to ponder, "Were I in this situation what must I do about Jesus?" Matthew's brilliant conclusion implies: Jesus has completed His mission expressed through His incarnation. Now He grants us the fellowship of His omnipresent Spirit, in order that we might successfully and joyfully fulfil ours.

For further study, see Wilson, *Learning From Jesus*, 531-541.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. In relation to the appearances in Jerusalem, when did the appearance in Galilee recorded by Matthew occur?
2. To whom did Jesus appear on this occasion?
3. Explain why some of these could worship Him.
4. Explain why others doubted.
5. How many appearances of Jesus does Matthew report?
6. What may we learn about Jesus from His self-revelation in this section?
7. Quote the pre-amble to the Great Commission.
8. Explain why this introduction to the Great Commission was necessary.
9. List every evidence in the Gospel of Matthew that conclusively established that Jesus really possessed all authority.
10. What does it mean to baptize "into the name of" someone?
11. In what sense would Jesus say, "I am with you"?
12. How could His presence with His people last "until the end of the world"?

## SPECIAL STUDIES

### THE KIND OF MESSIAH GOD HAS IN MIND ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

From the very first page of his Gospel Matthew flashes before his readers a series of radical claims for Jesus that must be taken seriously and examined carefully. Before the reader has completed two chapters, Matthew has already introduced Jesus of Nazareth as:

1. The descendant of the principal heirs of the promises God gave to the Hebrew people, Abraham and David (1:1-17). Yet, He descends from at least three Gentile ancestresses.
2. He comes from God by the activity of the Holy Spirit (1:18-25).
3. Rather than liberate His people from their national enemies, He comes to "save them from their sins" (1:21). He is named "Jesus" ("Javeh saves") and "Immanuel, God with us" (1:23).
4. Though He is the "ruler who shall pastor God's people" (2:6), He is the object of the indifference of the clergy and the persecution of the powerful (2:1-23).
5. The very inauspicious circumstances surrounding His birth, combined with the disgusting nickname, "the Nazarene" (1:23), point to a suffering Messiah from the very beginning.
6. John the Baptist presented Jesus as the Judge who would execute the justice of God and who alone was qualified to immerse men in the Holy Spirit (3:1-12)! Yet, Matthew's Messiah appeared for the first time in public as just another common man among the sinners who presented themselves to John for baptism (3:13-15). Despite His humanness, He is God's beloved Son and anointed with the Holy Spirit (3:16, 17).
7. The Messiah relived the same trials of His own people, proving Himself faithful to God as His authentic "Son," responding to the temptations, not as would an angel, but, rather, with the attitude of a true human being who is a worshiper of God (4:1-11).
8. The Messiah is concerned with the enlightenment of the benighted among the Gentiles (4:12-17; Isa. 9:1f.).
9. As the "new Moses" Jesus is not merely a great Lawgiver who repeats what God told him, but actually rises above the Mosaic Law to say what He personally requires (5:21, 27, 32, 34, 39, 44). Further, He is a Messiah who will "fulfil the Law," bringing it to its proper completion (5:17).
10. Jesus is a Messiah who has time for, and is powerfully competent to help, the impure nature's most violent forces (8:23-27),

## THE KIND OF MESSIAH GOD HAS IN MIND

- demoniacs (8:28—9:1), paralyzed sinners (9:1-8), the outcasts of society (9:9-13), the pious but ignorant (9:14-17), and many others (9:18-34). Despite the multiplicity of appeals for His help, He regards people with genuine compassion (9:36-38), as an abandoned flock over which God assumes the care. (Cf. Ezek. 34.)
11. Jesus presents Himself as Teacher and Master and Lord of the House. He expects His followers to suffer for His sake, and assumes upon Himself the role of Lawyer, or Advocate, at the Judgment of God. (Cf. 10:18, 22, 32, 33, 37-39.)
  12. Even the mighty miracles of Jesus do not force people to believe in Him (11:2-24). They merely push His hearers into two positions: belief or unbelief. John the Baptist himself hesitated in the presence of contradictions in his own mind, the works notwithstanding (11:2-19). The Galileans did not understand their need to submit to Jesus by repenting (11:20-24). "The wise and understanding" could not grasp the wisdom and source of His work (11:25-27). He is the kind of Messianic King that is comprehensible only to the man who is ready to do the will of the Father (12:50).
  13. In contrast to the austere John the Baptist, Jesus is a Messiah whose life is full of the fulness of the human life (11:16-19). Notwithstanding the different life-style of the two messengers of God, the results demonstrated that God had acted with wisdom in sending them precisely as He did.
  14. Jesus reveals everything willingly to those who submit to His instruction and commit themselves to learn from Him (11:28-30). This intention involves growth of character, not automatic righteousness. Still, He is gentle and lowly in heart, and able to move mercifully among contrasting levels of society and help people.
  15. Jesus is the kind of Messiah who does not overwhelm His opposition with a brilliant burst of supernatural power, forcing their belief and submission. Rather, He generously meets their questions, doubts, objections and cavils with answers sufficient to convince the common, honest listener (12:1-50). In fact, when the opposition demands the supernatural "fireworks," He who could call down 10,000 angels gave a common, perfectly acceptable sign. (Cf. 16:1-4.)
  16. Jesus is the Servant of Javeh (12:18-21 = Isaiah 42:1-4).
  17. Jesus recognizes no claims of blood or kinship of the flesh, only moral ties cemented by obedience to the will of God (12:46-50).
  18. Jesus respects the human freedom of His own townspeople at

## THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

- Nazareth, however severely He must have been tempted to do many mighty works there "just to show 'em!" (13:54-58).
19. Even in His own ministry, Jesus respected His own time schedules, not only bending every lesson to prepare for the cross in His life, but avoiding unnecessary conflicts that would tend to abbreviate the time available to teach His disciples (Matt. 14:13a; cf. 4:12; 15:21; 16:4b).
  20. He is realistic about the overconfidence of His followers, since He knows that they can be influenced by popular leaders and parties' skepticism about Him (16:5-12). However, He has no fear to entrust the mission of the Church-Kingdom to men dedicated to Him (16:13-20).
  21. He does not swerve from the predetermined plan of God, notwithstanding the most strenuous efforts of earthly friends to dissuade Him from being the type of Messiah God has in mind (16:21-28).
  22. He will be the glorious Judge of every man, repaying each according to what he has done, thus fulfilling in full all that John the Baptist predicted of Him (16:27).
  23. He is the glorious Messiah foreshadowed by the Law and the prophets, to whom all must listen and obey (17:1-8). However, He would suffer the same fate as John (17:10-13).
  24. Despite His real exemption from paying tribute to God's temple, because He is God's Son, still He meekly pays it, in order not to scandalize those who would not understand His standpoint and miss His message because of it (17:24-27).
  25. He is the kind of Messiah who refuses to recognize artificial claims to honor and greatness. Rather, His "rule of greatness" is the degree to which anyone renders service to the weakest, smallest, least important in the Kingdom (18:1-35).
  26. He is the kind of Messiah that refuses earthly power-structures as a means of ruling over men, choosing rather the path of service as the ransom for man (20:20-28).
  27. Despite His dissimilarity to everything Messianic in the popular mind, Jesus really is God's kind of Messianic King (21:1-17).
  28. He is the kind of Messiah that, despite His autonomous miracle-working power and God-given authority, does not undervalue nor forget the importance of His lesser servants' ministry (21:23-27).
  29. He is really the "chief corner stone" God planned to use (21:42), really God's Son (21:33-43).

30. No mental image of the Messiah is adequate that sees His Messiahship as having only earthly regality, such as that of a "Son of David" reigning on a material throne in Jerusalem. In fact, the true Messiah, as David himself admits, must be thought of as the "Lord of David" (22:41-46).
31. Jesus is objective, willing to recognize truth wherever it is found and correctly taught, even if it is a Pharisee that teaches it (23:2, 3).
32. Jesus is Israel's truest Patriot (23:37-39), but true Prophet (24:1-28) and "Son of man" (24:29-44; cf. Dan. 7:13, 14).
33. He is the glorious Messianic King before whom all nations will be tried, whose judgment affects the eternal destiny of each one, and whose judgment is based upon how each one treated "the least of these my brethren" (25:31-46).
34. He is not a helpless victim going innocently to an unexpected, tragic death, but "the Son of man" fully self-possessed moving majestically and consciously toward victory. He willingly pours out His blood to establish a new covenant and provide forgiveness (26:1, 2, 12, 13, 26-29).
35. Jesus is not the kind of Messiah that would abandon His vacillating disciples, even though He proved to them that He knew what their reaction would be to His death, despite their good intentions (26:30-35).
36. Jesus is a fully human Messiah who could really suffer, flinching at the thought of death (26:36-46).
37. Though under arrest and abandoned by His Apostles and betrayed by His Apostle, He remains the real Master of the situation (26:47-56).
38. He is definitely innocent of any guilt, according to His betrayer-Apostle (27:4), the wife of Pilate (27:19) and Pilate himself (27:18, 24).
39. He is self-controlled despite temptations to return accusations and insults (26:62, 63, 67, 68; 27:12-14, 27-31, 40, 43).
40. Jesus is proven to be the Messiah of God even in His death, as shown by His fulfilment of the ancient prophecies (27:32-48). His death signalled the end of an era and the beginning of another (27:51-54).
41. Jesus is the victorious Christ to whom universal authority has been granted and who orders His people to participate in His personal mission to teach the entire world (28:18-20). His presence with His people until the end of time guarantees His concrete interest in their affairs and His care for them.

## WHO IS JESUS ACCORDING TO MATTHEW?

1. Jesus is the fulfilment of all God's promises to ancient Israel:
  - a. He is the descendant of Abraham and David (1:1-17; Gen. 12:2f.; II Sam. 7:11ff.).
  - b. He is the Son of the virgin (1:23; Isa. 7:14) "God with us" (Isa. 7:14).
  - c. He is the Ruler, the Shepherd of Israel born in Bethlehem (2:6; Mic. 5:2).
  - d. He was God's reason for calling Israel out of Egypt (2:15; Hos. 11:1).
  - e. He is what it means to be called a Nazarene (2:23; cf. Ps. 22; Isa. 53; 49:6f.).
  - f. He is the Lord for whom John the Baptist must prepare (3:3; Mal. 3:1ff.).
  - g. He is the greater than John, who must immerse with the Holy Spirit and with fire unquenchable (3:11, 12; Mal. 3:2; 4:1; Joel 2:28ff.).
  - h. He is God's Son possessed of the Spirit of God (3:17; Isa. 61:1, 2; 42:1).
  - i. He is willing to do anything God requires (3:15; 4:1-11).
  - j. He is the great light to the Gentiles (4:12-17; Isa. 9:1, 2).
  - k. He is the fulfilment of the Law and Prophets (5:17-48).
  - l. He is the great Servant of Jahweh who bears our infirmities (8:17; Isa. 53:4).
  - m. He is the great Servant of Jahweh in whom Gentiles may hope (12:15-21; Isa. 41:1, 2).
  - n. He is Zion's true King (21:5; Zech. 9:9).
  - o. He is Jahweh incarnate whose praise on the lips of children silences His enemies (21:16; Ps. 8:2).
  - p. He is the stone the builders rejected (21:42, 44; Ps. 118:22, 23).
  - q. He is David's Son and David's Lord (22:44f.; Ps. 110:1).
  - r. He is the Pierced One over whom Israel would bitterly wail (24:30; Zech. 12:10-14).
  - s. He is the great "Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (24:30b; Dan. 7:9-14; Matt. 26:64).
  - t. He is the stricken Shepherd (26:31; Zech. 13:7).
  - u. He is the Servant of God sold for the price of a slave (27:9f.; Zech. 11:12f.; Jer. 32:6-9).
  - v. He is the despised and afflicted Servant of God (27:46; Ps. 22:1ff.).

To the discerning reader, well-schooled in Old Testament literature, Jesus would appear to be everything God had taught Israel to expect, even if Matthew did not explicitly cite every possible reference.

## WHO IS JESUS ACCORDING TO MATTHEW?

2. Beyond what had specifically been prophesied, Jesus is One greater than Moses, the Law and the Temple, the Sabbath.
  - a. While demanding a standard that is higher than Mosaic legislation (Matt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44), He expected men to be perfect as God (Matt. 5:48). He blessed people who suffered for His sake (5:11; 16:24-27; 10:18-39; 24:9, 13)
  - b. He not only expected that men accept His teachings as the rock-foundation of their lives (7:24-27), but proclaimed Himself the divine Judge with whom all must have to do at the final Day (7:21-23).
  - c. He possessed the right of earth to forgive sins which only God could do (9:1-7).
  - d. He demands absolute loyalty to Himself, a loyalty evidenced by public confession and rewarded by presentation personally to the Heavenly Father (10:32, 33, 37-39). To receive the least disciple in Jesus' name is to receive God (10:40-42)!
  - e. Moses could point men to the Law and Prophets (Deut. 18:15-18), but Jesus invited men to Himself (11:28-30), because the Father had intrusted everything to Him (11:27).
  - f. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and must do what is good in it (12:1-14). He introduced principles greater than the Temple (12:6).
  - g. Jesus claimed a unique Sonship to God, unshared with any other (7:21; 10:32f.; 11:25-27; 12:50; 15:13; 16:27; 18:10, 19, 35; 20:23; 21:37ff.; 22:2; 26:53; 26:39, 42).
  - h. Jesus is the Owner of the world (13:24-30, 37-43).
  - i. He did not correct men who confessed Him to be God's Son (cf. 8:29), but rather praised them (14:33; 16:16f.). See also 27:54.
  - j. Jesus is to be heard, while Moses and Elijah must forever fade into the background (17:3, 5, 7).
  - k. Jesus and His Apostles will judge all Israel (19:28) not Moses and the Prophets.
  - l. Jesus is the One whose life must be given as a ransom for many (20:28).
  - m. Jesus is the Sender of the New Testament prophets, wise men and teachers (23:34).
  - n. Jesus, as Son of Man in the Danielean sense, is final judge of the entire human race (25:31-46).
  - o. Jesus' blood ratifies the covenant, because poured out for the forgiveness of sins of many people (26:28).

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3. Jesus is Someone greater than the great ones of the Old Testament.
  - a. He is greater than Jonah who brought Ninevah to its knees before God (12:39-41).
  - b. He is greater than Solomon whose God-given wisdom brought the Queen of the South to hear him (12:42).
4. Matthew's conclusion (28:1-20).
  - a. Jesus is risen from the dead (28:1-10).
    - (1) Vindicated by angels (28:1-7).
    - (2) Seen by women (28:8-10).
  - b. Jesus' greatness denied by Jewish gold and Roman lies (28:11-15)
  - c. Jesus' Great Commission (28:16-20).
    - (1) Jesus' authority is universal and the basis of His final orders.
    - (2) Jesus' final commission is to disciple every nation and edify the baptized believers by committing to them everything Jesus taught the original witnesses.
    - (3) Jesus' promise to be with His people till the very end.

## THE TITLES OF JESUS IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

1. Jesus' personal name "Jeshua" or "Jehoshua" means "Javeh is salvation" or "Javeh saves," a fact made specific by Matthew's citation of the angel's words: "He will save His people from their sins" (1:21).
2. Jesus is "the son of David" by virtue of His genealogy (1:1-17), a fact underlined by the angel's address to Joseph: "Joseph, son of David . . ." (1:20), and stated by others elsewhere. (Cf. 9:27; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9, 15; 22:41-46.)
3. Matthew considered it essential for even Hebrew readers to see the significance of Jesus' fulfilment of the prophecy about the Virgin Birth (Isa. 7:14), whereby the child born is evidence of "God with us," "Emmanuel" in Hebrew (Matt. 1:23).
4. From the Gospel's title forward, Matthew speaks of Jesus as "Christ," God's Anointed (1:1, 16, 17, 18; 2:4; 11:2; 16:16, 20; 22:42; 23:10; 24:5, 23; 26:63, 68; 27:17, 22).
5. Jesus is "Lord" (3:3; 7:21f.; 21:3; 24:42, 48; 25:11, 19). There are many texts in Matthew where people address Jesus as "Lord," however with the common meaning of "Sir" or "Mister." Yet, there is also a growing importance evident in some of the uses of this title, especially when used in conjunction with other titles. (Cf. 8:25; 14:28, 30; 15:22; 20:31).
6. Jesus is the Ruler of God's people (2:6).
7. Jesus is God's Son (2:15; 3:17; 8:29; 14:33; 16:16; 17:5; 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54). Jesus proves Himself a genuine "Son of God" by His obedience to the Father's will (4:3, 6).
8. Although not a specific title, Jesus is, however, pictured as "the Forgiver of sins on earth" (9:6).
9. He is "the Servant of Javeh" (12:18).
10. He is, upon reflection, the Owner of the world. (Cf. 13:24, 27, 37, 38.)
11. Jesus is "the prophet" (21:11).
12. Jesus is addressed as, or described as "Teacher" (8:19; 9:11; 10:24f.; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36; 23:8; 26:18). He thinks of Himself as the disciples' "one Leader" (23:10).
13. Jesus pictures Himself as "the King" of the Kingdom of God judging the servants of God (25:31-34, 40). In His meek Messianic entry into the Holy City He fulfilled the style of Kingship pictured in Zechariah 9:9 which sees Him as Israel's King (21:5).

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14. Jesus calls Himself "the Son of Man" (8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40; 13:37, 41; 16:13, 27, 28; 17:9, 12, 22; 19:28; 20:18, 28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:2, 24, 45, 64). Because of the evident allusion to the Danielic vision of "the Son of man" (Dan. 7:13, 14) and the greatness of that personage who comes on the clouds of heaven, and because Matthew's Gospel was written after Jesus' vindication in His resurrection, ascension and glorification, should not all of the "Son of man" passages be read in this light? Granted that the original hearers of this expression would not have understood this much, what would this prove? They did not understand many things about the other titles either.

## REACTIONS TO JESUS ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

### A. DISCIPLES: TRUST AND OBEDIENCE, ALTHOUGH NOT WITHOUT SOME FAILURES.

1. The first disciples (4:18-22) called to participate in Jesus' ministry.
2. Amazement of the Apostles at the calming of the tempest on the sea (8:23-27).
3. Willingness of Matthew to leave all and follow Him (9:9-13).
4. Instances where Jesus' disciples are under attack for following His thinking rather than Pharisean or other popular interpretations. (Cf. 9:14; 12:2; 15:2.)
5. Willingness of disciples to be "babes" to accept Jesus' revelations (11:25ff.).
6. The disciples prove the reality of their discipleship by going to Jesus for explanations and answers (13:10-17, 36).
7. The disciples are baffled about how to feed the 5000, but offer themselves ready helpers when Jesus indicates the course to follow (14:15-18).
8. Peter trusted Jesus to enable him to walk on the sea, but when his faith failed, Jesus' rescue and general mastery of the sea and the situation caused the disciples to confess Him thus: "Truly you are God's Son" (14:28-33)!
9. Troubled by Jesus' intransigence in the face of the theological opposition to His ministry, the disciples fear offending the Pharisees (15:12). However, Jesus' puzzling answer draws out the disciples' real discipleship to Him, when Peter asks for explanations (15:15).
10. Unable to grasp Jesus' enigmatic warning against the influence of popular leaders and parties, they prove themselves unable to trust Jesus to create bread out of nothing, apparently not remembering the two recent miracles of multiplication of food (16:8ff.).
11. Despite many popular opinions to the contrary, the Twelve in the person of Peter confess Jesus' true identity. However, they (Peter) react vigorously to any mention of His future suffering (16:13-23).
12. Peter's exuberant suggestion to place Jesus, Moses and Elijah on equal terms, had to be corrected by God's: "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him" (17:1-13)! His desire to remain on the mountain only points up his lack of comprehension

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- concerning the way in which the Messianic mission should be realized.
13. The nine disciples' failure to heal the epileptic boy is attributed to a lack of sufficient fundamental faith (17:14-20).
  14. The second announcement of Jesus' suffering is received with great sorrow (17:22, 23).
  15. Peter supposed Jesus to be subject to the Temple-tax, from which, as Son of the Temple's Owner, He was really exempt (17:24-27).
  16. The disciples supposed that Jesus' Kingdom was one in which human greatness was to be measured by the power wielded over others (18:1-35).
  17. The disciples were astonished that marriage can be dissolved for only one reason, i.e. fornication, and conclude that celibacy is the only solution (19:9-12).
  18. The disciples rebuked people who desired that Jesus bless their children (19:13-15).
  19. The disciples were astonished that wealth should be considered a grave danger to one's eternal salvation (19:26). Despite Jesus' warning, Peter asked what (wealth, position, authority or other) they would receive as rewards for their self-denial (19:27)!
  20. James and John, still refusing to admit the spiritual nature of God's Kingdom, seek power and position for themselves (20:20-28). The others were indignant at the two brothers, jealous that James and John had asked for the coveted positions first.
  21. It is conceivable that some of the crowds present during the triumphal entry actually welcomed Jesus as God's Messianic King without ulterior motives, despite their own mistaken notions about God's intentions for Him (21:1-11).
  22. Despite Jesus' sternness and vigor shown while cleansing the temple, the needy and the little children came to Him with their problems and their praise (21:12-17).
  23. The disciples were astonished at the withering of the fig tree (21:18-22).
  24. The disciples asked for explanations about the prophecy of Jerusalem's fall (24:3).
  25. Mary of Bethany lovingly anointed Jesus "for His burial" (26:6-13).

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26. The Twelve were shaken that one of their number should betray Jesus and they humbly asked in self-doubt whether it were they (26:20ff.).
27. Peter rejected the idea that he should deny Christ (26:31-35). All agreed that they would die with Christ.
28. In the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus refused to be defended by the sword, all forsook Jesus and fled (26:51-56).
29. Peter denied the Lord (26:69-75).
30. Disciples remained at the cross and saw to Jesus' burial (27:55-61).
31. Women behold first the empty tomb and then Jesus risen, then go to inform His disciples (28:1-10).
32. The Eleven behold Him in Galilee and are commissioned to evangelize the world (28:16-20). Although most worshiped Him, some doubted!

### B. JOHN THE BAPTIST: PERPLEXITY

1. At Jesus' baptism: "I should be baptized by you, and you come to me?" (3:14).
2. Indirectly through his disciples: "We fast, as do the Pharisees, but your disciples do not" (9:14ff.).
3. In prison: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (11:2ff.).
4. The apparent officiousness of Jesus' mother and brothers shares something of this same perplexity about Him. (Cf. 12:46-50.)

### C. THE MULTITUDES: READINESS TO RECEIVE MATERIAL BLESSINGS, SLOWNESS TO SURRENDER ALL TO JESUS.

1. First summary of ministry (4:23-25).
2. Astonishment at His teaching as one having authority, not as their scribes (7:28, 29).
3. Desire for a qualified, convenient discipleship (9:18-22).
4. Glorifying God for having given authority to forgive sins to men like Jesus (9:1-8).
5. Blind men, healed, disobedient to Jesus' requests for privacy (9:30, 31).
6. Marveling at Jesus' healing of dumb demoniac (9:32, 33).
7. Fickleness in not committing themselves to the wisdom represented in the respective ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus (11:7-19).

8. Refusal to repent; despite the quantity of proof of Jesus' authority to require it (11:20-24).
9. Half-surprised belief asked: "Can this be the Son of David?" after the liberation of a blind and dumb demoniac (12:22, 23).
10. Great crowds listened to the enigmatic Sermon in Parables, but apparently few bothered themselves to ask Jesus its real meaning (13:2, 34, 36; cf. 13:10-17).
11. Crowds flocked together for the Messianic excitement, but not necessarily to believe anything Jesus might say, on the basis of His divine credentials (14:13bff.).
12. The rich young ruler offered to follow but the price was too high (19:16-22).
13. Great crowds joined in the Triumphal Entry of the Messiah for various motives (21:2-11).

#### D. THE ENEMIES: DEDICATED OPPOSITION

1. Pharisees attacked Jesus' acceptance of the outcasts of Hebrew society (9:9-13). Their reaction is that of men who live in a situation of security and certainty about their own rightness and their judgment of those who disagree with them.
2. Pharisees raise objections to Jesus' flagrant disregard for their private interpretations of the Sabbath Law, views that push them to blind, inhuman mercilessness to God's creatures for whose benefit God gave His law (12:1-14). They begin to plot His destruction.
3. Finding no suitable alternative explanation for His obviously supernatural power, the Pharisees must resort to the accusation that His good deeds were done in harmony with Satan and through his power (12:22-45). But this rejection of God's Spirit as the source of Jesus' power, is forever not to comprehend God's Kingdom as revealed by Jesus (12:28).
4. The Nazarenes, while not opposing Jesus with the vehemence shown on His former major visit to Nazareth (cf. Luke 4:16-30), nevertheless totally undervalued Him, found themselves without adequate explanation of their local Son, and so confirmed their own unbelief (13:54-58).
5. Jesus definitely withdrew from Herod's country when news arrived of the latter's murder of John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner (14:1-13a; cf. Luke 9:9).

## REACTIONS TO JESUS

6. Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem attack Jesus over His disrespect for the traditions of the elders (15:1-20).
7. Pharisees and Sadducees challenge Him to prove His authority by providing them some "sign from heaven" (16:1-4).
8. Pharisees tested Jesus on the divorce question (19:3-9).
9. Chief priests and scribes object to the children's praise of Jesus in highly Messianic terms (21:15-17).
10. All the religious authorities, at various times and ways, attempt to trap Jesus by argument and are bested (21:23—22:46).
11. The Sanhedrin decided the death of Jesus and finally succeeded in carrying it out (26:1-5, 47—27:44). They accepted full responsibility for His death, freeing the political authority from this responsibility (27:24, 25).
12. To guarantee against fraudulent resurrection, the religious authorities sealed the tomb (27:62-66).
13. To counteract resurrection testimonies, the Sanhedrin bribed false witnesses (28:11-15).

## THE KIND OF KINGDOM GOD HAS IN MIND ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

1. By presenting Jesus as the humble babe of Bethlehem, adored by foreigners and rejected by His own people, then rescued by fleeing into a foreign country, Matthew pictures the hard reality of a Kingdom of God whose true value can be appreciated only through the eyes of faith and by the spiritual long view of things. Those who dreamed of a triumphalistic Messianic Kingdom must see the lowliness and suffering of Him of whom Matthew must speak (Matt. 2).
2. Matthew alone quotes Jesus' justification for His own immersion by John the Baptist (3:15). Jesus' Messiahship is founded on the principle that "We must do everything God says to, whether we understand it perfectly or not, whether we agree that it applies to us or not, whether it is popular or not, whether our best friends think we should or not,—just because God said to do it!" This is a Kingdom that collides with all notions of a Messianic utopia where we all get to do what WE want to.
3. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is the first concrete answer Matthew includes to the question: "What does it mean to fulfil all righteousness? What does it mean to submit ourselves to the Kingdom of God, i.e. to His plans and will?" If this Sermon is a manifesto of the Kingdom, and if Jesus Himself is the realization of all that God intended in the Old Testament Law (5:17-20), and if His Word is that which God now substitutes for that Law (5:21-48), then THE KINGDOM IS JESUS HIMSELF present among men. He is the new Law. Consequently, the Church is none other than the totality of those who follow HIM toward that fulfilment of God's plan that Jesus has reached. The promise of obtaining the Kingdom is directed to those aware of their spiritual poverty (5:3), the persecuted for doing God's will (5:10), and those whose obedience to God's will exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20).
4. The continued presence of threatened judgment upon the believer stands out in stark contrast with pre-Christian Jewish views of the Messianic Kingdom, according to which, in the days of the Messiah, the people of God would be miraculously and instantly purified. (Cf. 5:19a, 20, 22, 26, 29, 30; 6:1, 14, 15; 7:2, 13, 14, 19, 21-23, 26, 27).
5. If the Kingdom of God and His righteousness is to be sought first, above and beyond all human necessities (6:33), then it is not a

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- Kingdom that eliminates the struggles involved in our human existence, but rather becomes the goal of our efforts despite the continued existence of these "normal necessities" (6:24-34). The Kingdom must be understood as a present reality, present IN the humdrum of our existential world, not merely an eschatological release from that reality. The purpose of this insertion of the Kingdom INTO the sinful world is to be light to illuminate its darkness, salt to save it from its corruption (5:13-16).
6. The non-nationalistic, non-racial character of the Kingdom is underlined in the account of the healing of the centurion's servant (8:5-13). The specifically racial and nationalistic claims of the Jews received a serious blow dealt by Jesus' comments on the exceptional faith of the Roman.
  7. The Kingdom's standard of judgment is not based upon precise performance of rituals, but upon the real sincerity of one's motives for all that he does (5:8, 11, 19, 20, 22, 28, 32, 37, 44-47; 6:1ff., 24; 7:12, 18-20, 23).
  8. God's Kingdom is His mastery over human uncleanness and disease (8:1-4, 14-17). It means His personal entrance into our human misery and bearing it Himself (8:17 = Isaiah 53:4).
  9. God's rule must be considered as absolute, more demanding than the highest human need or responsibilities (8:18-22).
  10. God's Kingdom includes His control over the elements of the natural world (8:23-27).
  11. God's Kingdom is manifest in His total mastery over Satan's kingdom (8:28—9:1).
  12. God's Kingdom is evident in His right to forgive man's sin (9:2-8).
  13. The Kingdom of God is not a sect of purists ("the pure; the true Church"), but a movement that is genuinely open to all without distinction. If Matthew the publican can belong to it, ANYONE can (9:9-13)!
  14. The Kingdom is not triumphalistic, does not force men to believe or be righteous, but it proceeds because of its missionary spirit. Its missionaries, because they labor where frictions among men are the bitterest, where selfishness explodes in all its forms, must expect persecutions and death (10:16ff.). Even though God is present and judging His people, He may not intervene to halt those who kill them (10:28). Jesus' disciples are to be identified with Him in suffering and service (10:16-40).
  15. The unification of all men in the Kingdom of God can only come

## THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

about by the elimination of all false unities, even those founded upon blood relationships (10:34-39).

16. The Kingdom of God, in its earthly manifestation, can suffer opposition and violent attempts to force it to be something other than what it was designed to be (11:12). This is in perfect harmony with the absolute freedom of the human will to accept its teachings or not (11:14).
17. God's government of heaven and earth includes His gracious will to hide significant truth from those who pride themselves as being "the wise and understanding," while revealing the truth to humble, sincere disciples, "the babes" (11:25-30).
18. The rule of God over His people lifts them over the highest institutions of the Mosaic Law, the Sabbath and the Temple (12:1-14). "The Son of man is lord of the sabbath."
19. The operational power of the Spirit of God working in Jesus of Nazareth is positive proof that the Kingdom of God has come and that Satan is really defeated and plundered (12:22-29)!
20. Something greater than the wisdom of Solomon and the testimony of Jonah is involved in Jesus' representation of God's Kingdom (12:38-43).
21. The Kingdom of God is not founded upon fleshly ties, not even to the Messiah Himself, much less to Abraham, but upon doing what the Father in heaven wills (12:46-50).
22. Jesus presented the "secrets of the Kingdom of heaven" to everyone listening, but in parabolic form so as to distinguish between listeners. Those who trusted Jesus enough to come to Him for explanations, received more information about the nature, progress and destiny of the Kingdom of God, because they gained the explanations of the unforgettable parables they already possessed. Those who did not care enough for truth, or did not trust Jesus to know what He was about, not only did not gain this vital information, but also lost the value of the parables they had heard (13:10-17, 34, 35). Thus, the Church is made up of those who desire to trust and learn from Jesus even those truths of the Kingdom that are unclear, unpalatable, or seem wrong.
23. The kind of Kingdom God has in mind has the following characteristics:
  - a. The effectiveness of God's rule in individual lives depends directly upon each one's personal openness to truth and his willingness to let God rule (13:1-9, 18-23). If so, the Kingdom

## THE KIND OF KINGDOM GOD HAS IN MIND

- is not a materialistic regime that conquers by force of arms, but by the painfully slow process of planting truth in men's hearts, which are of widely varied character.
- b. The temporary presence of evil in the Kingdom of God is not His fault, because He is not the source of evil. Rather, He has inaugurated a process whereby final judgment will reveal the truly righteous and segregate the wicked. The "righteous," the congregation of the Messiah, really are the citizens of His Kingdom (13:24-30, 36-43). The continued presence of evil in the world is clear proof of man's moral freedom to decide his own fate (13:47-50). The Kingdom is the work of a God who knows the time of its maturing and of the final day.
  - c. Despite its microscopic beginnings, the Kingdom of God will grow and become a mighty empire, because of its internal life and extensive expansion (13:31, 32).
  - d. The Kingdom will grow quietly in the world, without great noise and commotion, but its progress will not be hindered until its intensive, transforming power influences all it touches (13:33).
  - e. Whether discovered accidentally or sought deliberately, the Kingdom of God, when discovered and appreciated at its true value, is worth all it costs (13:44-46).
  - f. The theologian who is a disciple of the Kingdom is a wealthy man who can bless his guests with treasured truth, the best of the old and the finest of the new (13:52).
24. It is not a kingdom in which external purity and ceremony has any real importance, but where the real purity of one's heart, as this is manifested in his spirit of obedience to whatever God requires, is everything (15:1-20).
  25. It is a Kingdom whose King, the Son of David, has time to bless even CANAANITES, despite the limitations of His personal mission to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:21-28)!
  26. It is a Kingdom where half-Jewish, half-Gentile populations can sit down to the Messianic banquet together, not because of personal worthiness, but because of the Messiah's bounty and graciousness (15:29-39).
  27. It is a Kingdom, rather, that one enters by death to self, and by acknowledgment of the true identity and consequent rights of the King (16:13-28). The "community of the Messiah" ("The

Church of Christ'), then, is but the *subjective* manifestation of the Messiah's *objective* rule. The Church is, in short, "the people of the Kingdom," the necessary result of the proclamation of God's sovereignty, a proclamation which calls into being a real assembly or communitary reality: the Church. It was to begin in the lifetime of Jesus' earthly disciples (16:28).

28. The Kingdom's power, while at the disposition of the disciples, is not automatic nor divisible from faith (17:14-21).
29. The "sons of the Kingdom" are free citizens, above even the obligatory Temple-tax (17:24-27).
30. Death to self, absolutely essential to entrance in the Kingdom, manifests itself in a refusal to recognize any standard of greatness other than the amount of service one renders to the weakest, smallest, least important in the Kingdom (18:1-35). No pride in achievement can justify unmercifulness or harsh treatment of any member of the Kingdom, however seemingly insignificant.
31. The Kingdom God has in mind is a community of the Messiah, yet it admits its internal problem and deals with them in an orderly manner (18:15-35). The problem of continued sinning and consequent need for forgiveness is to remain a live one, even after the beginning of the Kingdom. It is a Kingdom whose common life is characterized by its concern for the little ones, its reconciliation of brethren, its forgiveness of offenses, its purity of intentions, its harmony of life and its common prayer.
32. The Kingdom God has in mind is concerned with a right understanding of male-female relationships (19:3-12). Celibacy, even for sake of the Kingdom, is not possible for everyone.
33. The Kingdom of God belongs to "the children and such as they," not those whose adulthood makes them too proud to come to Jesus (19:13-15).
34. The Kingdom God has in mind does not belong exclusively to the wealthy, whom most people would automatically judge most qualified for it, being the most blessed by God who furnishes the power to become wealthy (19:13-30).
35. In God's Kingdom earth's value-systems and power structures have no importance, except in a negative way in the sense that they are condemned among believers (19:23-26).
36. Loyalty to Jesus Christ, as this is manifest in the sacrifices made for His sake, will be richly rewarded in that expression of God's Kingdom "in the world to come" (19:27-30).

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37. In fact, God's Kingdom attributes no priority to anyone on the basis of supposed merits or personal achievements, because the basis of blessing is the free choice and mercy of the King (20:1-16).
38. The usual, earthly power-structures have no relation to anything Jesus has in mind for His Kingdom. Rather, the measure of greatness and power is service and usefulness to others, not self-seeking and self-aggrandisement (20:20-28).
39. God intends that His Kingdom shall belong to people who will produce the results God desires. Therefore, it cannot long remain the private possession of those who do not (21:23-43).
40. The Kingdom of Heaven is a question of free choice that may be accepted or rejected, but not, however, without serious consequences. Many are invited into it, but few prove finally acceptable (22:1-14).
41. Surprisingly, God's Kingdom does not conflict with normal, constituted human authority nor vice versa, and may be considered consistent with it when properly exercised (22:15-21).
42. While the present phase of the Kingdom of God is played out on earth's stage, the resurrection of the dead ushers men into a different state of life with the God of the living (22:23-33).
43. The religion and ethics of God's Kingdom may be summed up as love for God and unselfish service to one's neighbor (22:34-40).
44. The "son of David," long-awaited Messianic King, must also be the Lord of David (22:41-46).
45. In God's Kingdom, there are not to be "many chiefs," just one Father, one Teacher, one Leader. Everyone else is one of the "brothers" (23:7-10).
46. Nor is God's Kingdom to be exclusive and sectarian on the basis of human traditions and proselytization. Rather, its concerns will be with the things that count: justice, mercy and faith, inward purity, consciousness of God, moral understanding, hatred of sin (23:13-36).
47. The Kingdom God has in mind and of which Jesus is the Messianic King, will not be without its "prophets, wise men and theologians," sent as Christian missionaries to save Israel (23:34). Not only is their preparation emphasized here, but also their mission of mercy to an unworthy people.

48. The way in which God's Kingdom would be carried on will create a situation in which constant vigilance and constant preparation are absolutely essential to please the King (24:36—25:13). There remains the live possibility of losing everything, despite one's privileged position as servant of the King. The King's arrival will be delayed (24:45; 25:5). But the daily life of the citizen must be one marked by faith, sobriety, alertness and dedicated service.
49. The Kingdom involves a trust of the King's goods left in custody of His servants, to be utilized for His benefit (25:14-30). The King's return will be delayed (25:19). This only emphasizes the greatness of the opportunity to make good use of His goods for His glory.
50. The Kingdom involves a proper, personal care for the world's needy to whom service is to be rendered as if to the King Himself (25:31-46).
51. The Kingdom God has in mind is based on covenant sealed in Jesus' blood, furnishing the forgiveness of sins (26:28). The "fruit of the vine" which symbolized "the blood of the covenant" would be shared with Jesus' disciples "in the Father's Kingdom" (26:29).
52. Since Jesus was tried and crucified by the Romans and Jews as "the King of the Jews," and since God vindicated Jesus' right to this title by raising Him from the dead, it should be clear to Matthew's readers that God's Kingdom, the Kingdom of Israel as God envisioned it, was not to be of the type usually dreamed of in current Jewish speculation, but precisely the Kingdom Jesus continuously and consistently represented to them. It is almost as if Matthew were saying: "The exclusively Jewish 'King of the Jews' is dead, never to rise again, not crucified by His own people, but by the King Himself. In His place there arose the true King of the new Israel, the King of the universe with authority in heaven and on earth." (Cf. 28:18.)
53. While our King is one in the daily expectation of whose return from a long trip we are to live (cf. 24:45-48; 25:5, 19), He is always near us, by our side, and His faithfulness will not fail (28:20).
54. Whereas in Mark we read of "the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God," the object of the announcement being the person of Jesus

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Himself, in Matthew the characteristic expression is "the gospel of the Kingdom," almost as if it is meant that the object of the Gospel, the purpose of the Christian message is the actual proclamation of the Kingdom. (Cf. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14 in contrast to Mark 1:1, 14).

55. Because the *Kingdom* of God expresses the *will* of God, His Kingdom is evident in His choice to reveal His plans, not to the intelligentsia, but to little children (11:25, 26).
56. God does not will that any of these little ones should be lost through neglect or stumbling blocks of other disciples (18:14).
57. **WHATEVER** God wills is the essence of the Kingdom of God in one's life, regardless of how deeply that cuts across our choices or preferences (26:39).

## THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

1. Despite the variety of events in the history of the Jewish people, as these are noted in the record of Jesus' genealogy, God was silently working to bring His Messiah into the world (1:1-17).
2. Despite the real perplexities of Joseph about his beloved Mary, God was taking care of Jesus by providing Him a legal father and protection for His mother. Despite human experience of a virgin birth, God chose this method to come into the world, so that in the human Jesus, we learn what it means to have "God with us" (1:18-25).
3. Despite the clever planning of a murderous king, God rescued Jesus from harm and furnished sufficient funds for an extended sojourn in Egypt by gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (2:1-21).
4. God will severely judge an unrepentant Israel, notwithstanding her claims to physical descent from Abraham, unless she embraces "the Lord" for whom John prepared the way (3:1-12).
5. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus underscored again and again "the Fatherhood of God" and His Fatherly care. (Cf. 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 14, 15, 18, 26, 32; 7:11.) Despite the terror of the persecutions which would tempt Christians to close themselves up in monastic seclusion, their purpose must be to glorify their Father who watches over their most secret thought and cares for their most fundamental needs.
6. The Mission of the Twelve is born in prayer to "the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (9:38). It is His field for which He is responsible and into whose service we pray He will raise up laborers. Despite the temptations to deny everything because of the terrors of the persecutions, God watches over His creation and will bless with victory all who proclaim His Word, although He may not intervene to halt those who would kill the body (10:26-31). He will not forget even the smallest help given His people (10:40-42).
7. Notwithstanding the incomprehension encountered by Jesus among His own people, God's sovereign decision to reveal Himself and His will in precisely the way Jesus had followed was gratefully accepted by Jesus (11:25-27). God's design actually worked and was being realized by Jesus' works. The sovereign Lord of heaven and earth is not forced to bow before those who believe themselves lords of the world ("the wise and understanding") (11:25).
8. It is God who can guarantee that all the sacrifices of Christ and

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His people will only result in life lived at its best (16:24-28). Life belongs to God, and only He can transform it. All that Jesus demands becomes comprehensible, if seen as obedience to God who by resurrection defeats our death, even as He did it for Jesus (16:21).

9. It is God who speaks from heaven, confirming Jesus' ministry, notwithstanding what all human judgment must pronounce a failure in His mission and procedure and results (17:5). Success, in God's view, must be obtained at the cross, both by Jesus and by each single disciple.
10. With God all things are possible, even the damnation of men despite their wealth and the saving of those who sacrifice all they possess for Jesus' sake, and who would be considered "poor" in human judgment (19:23-30).
11. The absolute Lordship of God is manifest in His free gift of grace to those whom He wishes to bless, regardless of the apparent unworthiness of these latter (20:1-16). Rather than measure the recompense on the basis of one's achievements, Jesus reaffirms that everything depends upon the free choice and mercy of God.
12. The sovereignty of God is underlined in the Parables of the Vineyard and the Marriage Feast, in that the owner of the vineyard can (and should) put the former share-farmers to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants, and in that the king can rightfully send his troops to destroy the murderers of his messengers, burn their city, and replace them with just anyone who would come. But, even so, all must conform to his terms for remaining in his grace (21:33—22:14).
13. Jesus' quotation of Zechariah 13:7 points to God as the Ruler of history and who does everything according to His plan for man's salvation, even if this is not the kind of Messianism that man would design (26:31, 32).
14. Even in the attitude of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (26:36-46) we see the theme of human weakness in the presence of the will of God that must be carried out to the utmost. Temptation to give in is something that continually hangs over man, and only God can furnish him the strength to endure it.
15. The Garden arrest must take place "according to the Scriptures," because God, who ordered these events and is back of the Scriptures, is the final, real Actor in every event (26:56).
16. After Jesus' victory and receiving universal authority, He promises

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His people that, while they carry out His mission on earth, He will be with them until the end of the age. This means that His people are those disciples who are determined to follow the same path He did, confiding only in the blessing of God (Christ), sure that they will never be alone, since He, the sovereign God in Christ, is always guarding them (28:16-20).

17. The sovereignty of God is seen in the picture of Jesus as the Man over whom God had been watching even before His birth and had foreseen and prepared for every part of His life. This is especially emphasized in His fulfilment of prophecies. Among Matthew's at least forty formal quotations of the Old Testament, the following are expressly cited as being particularly indicative of God's preparation for and care of Jesus even before His appearance on earth:

MATTHEW	OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGE
1:23	Isa. 7:14
2:6	Mic. 5:2
2:15	Hos. 11:1 (cf. Exod. 4:22)
2:23	"prophets" Isa. 52:13—53:12; Ps. 22; Isa. 11:1?
3:3	Isa. 40:3
4:4	Deut. 8:3
4:7	Deut. 6:16
4:10	Deut. 6:13
4:15, 16	Isa. 9:1, 2
8:17	Isa. 53:4
11:10	Mal. 3:1
12:18-21	Isa. 42:1-4
21:5	Zech. 9:9
21:13b	Jer. 7:11
21:16	Ps. 8:2 (LXX 8:3)
21:42	Ps. 118:22, 23
22:44	Ps. 110:1
23:38, 39	Ps. 118:26; Jer. 22:5
24:29-31	Isa. 13:10; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10; 2:31; 3:15; Isa. 34:4b; Hag. 2:6, 21; Zech. 12:10, 12; Dan. 7:13, 14; Isa. 27:13; Deut. 30:4; Zech. 2:6
26:31	Zech. 13:7
26:64	Ps. 110:1; Dan. 7:13, 14
27:9, 10	Zech. 11:12, 13; Jer. 32:6-15
27:46	Ps. 22:1

## THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

What kind of information did Jesus reveal about God's Fatherhood? While clearly picturing Him as "the Lord your God" (4:10; 22:37), as the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (10:28), as the sovereign "Lord of heaven and earth" (11:25) and as "king of the kingdom of God (18:23, 35), etc., our Lord laid heavy emphasis on God's fatherly character. Does Jesus picture Him as a celestial Santa Claus or as an unquestioning, all-accepting divine Grandfather or otherwise? Consider these revelations:

1. All our good deeds must be done so that others' praise will go to our Father (5:16).
2. Loving kindness to enemies makes us true sons of our Father in heaven (5:44). His perfection is our standard (5:48).
3. Our acts of righteousness must be done with a view to being rewarded by our heavenly Father alone (6:1-18).
4. In contrast to dead, pagan deities whose devotees must hopelessly, endlessly cry to them, our heavenly Father knows that we need daily necessities (6:32), and He gives only good gifts to those who ask Him (7:11).
5. Entrance into heaven's Kingdom depends on doing the will of Jesus' Father (7:21).
6. Early disciples, on trial for their Christian testimony, may depend with full confidence on the Spirit of our Father speaking through them (10:20).
7. Nothing sinister can happen to a faithful disciple, apart from what our Father permits (10:29).
8. However, it is before Jesus' Father in heaven that the disciple will be acknowledged or disowned, according to his attitude and faithfulness on earth (10:32f.).
9. Jesus sustained a unique, unshared relationship to this Father, whom He could call "my Father" in a way distinct from the relationship to this Father known by every disciple, because the Father had committed all things to Him (11:25-27).
10. The kinship to Jesus that really counts is not physical, based on a coincidental or miraculous fleshly relationship, but rather spirit, based on doing the will of His heavenly Father (12:50).
11. Although temporarily obscured in this life, after the judgment the righteous will be perfectly obvious in the kingdom of their Father (13:43).

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12. Any doctrine not finding its origin in the will of Jesus' heavenly Father will be eradicated, and those who follow blind leaders who hold such doctrines will suffer the consequences along with them (15:13).
13. Jesus' Father in heaven revealed to Peter the true identity of Jesus (16:17).
14. Our Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost, so their angels are granted instant access to His presence (18:14, 10).
15. Jesus' return to earth will be surrounded with His Father's glory (16:27).
16. All of the might of Jesus' Father in heaven is at the disposition of two humble disciples who agree to ask Him for something in prayer (18:19).
17. However, Jesus' Heavenly Father will not tolerate any unwillingness to forgive in His subjects (18:35).
18. It is Jesus' heavenly Father whose will determines places of honor in His Kingdom (20:23).
19. God is the only one who rightly deserves to be called "Father" in the high, ethical sense of Provider of spiritual life and guidance (23:9).
20. The Father alone knows the day of Christ's return (24:36).
21. The righteous will finally be blessed by the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (25:34), and not unlikely, He is the author of the curse upon the wicked (25:41).
22. Jesus viewed the glorious Messianic Kingdom as belonging to His Father (26:29).
23. Jesus pleaded with His Father to remove the cup of suffering (26:29, 42), and remained steadfastly confident that His Father could at once put more than twelve legions of angels at His disposal (26:53).

## THE KIND OF JUDGMENT GOD WILL EXERCISE ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

1. John preached repentance and deeds as all-important for spiritual preparation for the Messiah's coming, not pretended fleshly ties to Abraham. The judgment, while involving all of Israel, will examine each one individually (3:1-12). The Messiah Himself would be personally responsible to execute summary judgment.
2. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, underlined the inner purity of heart, the kind of motivated person that seeks God's will and man's good above personal interest. Only this kind of person will have God's approval. (Cf. 5:3-10, 21ff., 27ff., 44-48.) The rigor by which men deal with others will be the measure of severity or clemency by which they themselves are to be judged (5:7; 6:12, 14f.; 7:1-5). Men will be judged on the basis of what they do with JESUS' words (7:21-27). All are judged by their deeds and attitudes (7:15-23). Jesus Himself will decide the fate of all (7:22). God will not judge men merely by the standards of the most pious theologians of the day, the scribes and Pharisees (5:21), but against the standard of perfection itself (5:48)!
3. In the dialogue with the Gadarene demons, they demand to know if Jesus is come to punish them "before the time" of the final judgment (8:29). This suggests without stating it that Jesus Himself is the final Judge by whom these dark spirits must be judged and sentenced. How much more would mankind be judged by Him? "Before the time," however, means that the demons, and evil in general, are yet free to do their worst, even if drastically curbed for awhile and in limited ways. (The demons are cast out of the poor sufferers.)
4. God desires to exercise a judgment tempered with mercy, not merely the rigid, heartless censorship practiced by the Pharisees (Matt. 9:9-13, especially v. 13; 12:7).
5. God will save the man who endures to the end (10:22).
6. God will not destroy in hell those who, however frightened by persecutors and death, give their testimony boldly and confess Jesus before men (10:26-33).
7. God will judge sinners on the basis of their attitude toward His Holy Spirit (12:31f.), on the basis of the character of their heart as this is seen in their words, (12:33-37), and on their opportunities to know the truth (12:38-42), and on the basis of the practical emptiness of their sterile lives (12:43-45).
8. For the emphases on judgment in the Sermon in Parables (Matt. 13), see Note at the end.

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9. God judges men's ideas on the basis of their origin, not upon their acceptability to "current scholarship" (15:13). If their ideas did not originate in the truth of God, they will be eradicated in judgment.
10. God cannot tolerate any rivals to Jesus His Son, not even the greatest Law-givers and Prophets of Old Testament religion (17:5, 5). Men must see "Jesus only" (17:8).
11. Greatness in the Kingdom of God is measured by God's concern for the least, the last and the lost (18:10-14). Anything that causes these to be lost must be eliminated on the penalty of eternal destruction (18:8, 9). God will use the same rigor of judgment with which men treat one another (18:23-35).
12. The lesson of the barren fig tree cursed (21:18-22) is that God eliminates useless, unfruitful creatures, with a suddenness and severity that may surprise the observer, but with undoubted justice, because of the richness of opportunities to produce what, by their nature, they should be expected to produce.
13. The severe condemnations of Pharisaism and Jerusalem (23:1-39) teach that God's judgment condemns making religion a burden (23:1-4), "proud humility" (23:5-12), partisan zeal (23:13-15), the art of evasion (23:16-22), loss of the sense of moral proportions (23:23, 24), external purity in contrast to inner pollution (23:25-28), abuse of God's messengers (23:29-36), rejection of Love's appeals (23:37-39). They are without excuse, because they know God's will and do not do it (Cf. v. 3).
14. The great Eschatological Discourse deals with judgment upon Israel, then upon the world (Chapters 24, 25). The bases of judgment mentioned are readiness, faithfulness, usefulness, faithfulness to Jesus.

NOTE that all the major discourses recorded by Matthew proceed to a climax in judgment:

- a. The Sermon on the Mount ends on the parable of judgment against the house built on the sand foundation (7:24-27).
- b. The Sermon on the Apostolic Mission rises to a climax from fear of human persecutors to concern for not being acknowledged by Jesus in the presence of God the Father (10:26-33). The result of God's judgment will be determined by the positions taken during this life (10:34-39).
- c. The Sermon on John the Baptist, "Shall We Look For Another Christ?" emphasizes the theme of judgment upon the

- most favored cities where Jesus had bestowed His richest favors of blessing, healing and teaching. Judgment, says Jesus, will be in proportion to the light against which we have sinned (11:20-24). The very choice to hide certain truth from "the wise and understanding" while revealing them "to babes," is itself a judgment in which Jesus fully concurs (11:25ff.).
- d. The Sermon on the Kingdom of Heaven, told in truth-hiding parables, is itself a masterpiece of judgment executed upon those who had no desire for truth (13:10-17). The parable of the Sower emphasizes the grounds of the difference in reactions to truth and consequent judgment upon individuals (13:1-9, 18-23). The parable of the Weeds underscores the certainty of judgment, despite what appears to be unnecessary delay in its coming. It explains also the impossibility to pronounce premature judgments on our part (13:24-30, 36-43). The parables of the Yeast and the Mustard Seed pronounce God's judgment upon the progress of the Kingdom, despite man's opinions to the contrary (13:31-33). The parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Precious Pearl express God's judgment of the value of the Kingdom: it is worth all it costs the individual who acquires it (13:44-46). The story of the Dragnet repeats the message of the final, inexorable division of the world's people (13:47-50).
  - e. The Sermon on Personal Relations in the Kingdom thunders judgment without mercy against the unmerciful, by means of the parable of the Two Debtors (18:23-35).
  - f. The Sermon on the Sins of the Religious (Matt. 23), while itself almost entirely a thundering denunciation of a multitude of sins, rises to its dramatic climax in the words: "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth. . . . Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation" (23:33-36).
  - g. The Sermon on the End of the World (24, 25) underlines again and again not only the fall of everything not in God's plans, but also the necessity for immediate, personal preparation.

## “BY THEIR FRUITS YOU WILL KNOW THEM”

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BEARING FRUIT AND DOING WHAT JESUS DEMANDS

#### ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

1. John the Baptist defined “repentance” by demanding that those who pretend to repent should prove their sincerity by producing “fruits worthy of repentance,” i.e. the characteristic deeds of a changed life. Unless these deeds were forthcoming, punitive judgment would overtake the unfruitful, despite all pretenses and claims to the contrary (3:1-12).
2. The Messiah Himself insists upon being baptized by John “to fulfill all righteousness,” i.e. to do what God defines as right for any man (3:14, 15). The plan of God can be brought to fulfillment only in this way, not by fleeing one’s responsibility, but by accepting it completely.
3. The Sermon on the Mount is packed with blessings, admonitions and teaching to underscore the importance of deeds:
  - a. The active “peacemakers” are the sons of God (5:9). Only those who ardently desire to do the will of God will truly be satisfied in the Kingdom (5:6).
  - b. The true “salt and light” are useful to God (5:13-16).
  - c. Doing and teaching is God’s standard of greatness in the Kingdom (5:19).
  - d. Worshiping (5:24), almsgiving (6:2-4), praying (6:7ff.) and fasting (6:16ff.) are assumed to be part of the normal activity of the godly disciple, but are not more important a part of personal piety than active reconciliation (5:21-26), personal self-denial (5:27-32), absolute honesty (5:33-37), merciful generosity (5:38-42), and actively blessing one’s enemies (5:43-48).
  - e. The same judgment threatened against imposters is the standard for unfruitful disciples (7:19).
4. Real union with Christ is to be enjoyed, not by family relationship to Him by blood or by accidents of birth in the right family or people, but by obedience to the will of the Father (12:46-50).
5. The Sermon in Parables (chapter 13) links the disciples’ fruit-bearing to his understanding the word of the Kingdom (13:19, 23) as well as to his moral character (13:21, 22). Interest is shown, further, in the differing quantities of fruit borne even among the fruitful disciples. The Kingdom demands total commitment (13:44-46).

**"BY THEIR FRUITS YOU WILL KNOW THEM"**

6. Only total commitment to the will of God, even in the prospect of suffering and death, will be rewarded with life in its highest and best sense (16:24-28). Every man will be repaid for what he has done.
7. Instead of commanding the rich young ruler to trust Him, Jesus told him something to do (19:21). Although this implicitly involved total trust in Jesus to know what must be done to inherit eternal life, the deed is in the foreground. (Contrast John 6:29.) Life is to be had in doing what God wills (19:17).
8. Men will be rewarded on the basis of what they have given up for Jesus' sake (19:29).
9. The cursing of the fig tree because it had no fruit, just leaves, becomes an enacted lesson on the destiny of the fruitless, pretentious Israel that refused to believe Jesus (21:18-22). It is also a warning to every believer concerning the damnation of uselessness and the punishment of proud promises without performance. It applies to Jesus as well, because He too has made tremendous promises which could only be kept by going to the cross.
10. The Parable of the Two Sons emphasizes actually doing the will of the Father, as opposed to merely professing obedience without really doing it (21:28-32).
11. The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (21:33-46) explains that the Kingdom of God will not remain the private possession of those who do not produce the results God intends. Rather, it will rightly pass over to those who will (21:41, 43).
12. In all the lessons on vigilance during the eschatological wait for the Lord's return, the emphasis is laid upon usefulness in the Lord's service, doing the job He assigns, making the preparation that is needed for His return, utilizing the goods He entrusts to our custody, and caring for the people made in His image (24:45—25:46).
13. The Great Commission (28:18-20) includes the order to "teach them to observe all that I have commanded you." The teaching has as its goal the production of the results Jesus desired.

## THE KIND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS GOD HAS IN MIND ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

1. "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15) is not merely Jesus' reason for being baptized by John the Baptist, but His reason for living as He did and His model for us.
2. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Law of Moses is not despised, but fulfilled; not denied, but surpassed. Since Christ has come to fulfill God's promises and standards, He Himself takes over the function of the Law, and becomes the Law. The Law is already the realization of the Kingdom of God among men in the person of Jesus Himself, a law that cannot be codified, but must be totally accepted. It is no longer sufficient to perform certain actions. What counts is the spiritual attitude with which they are performed and the intentions that motivated them. In fact, much of Jesus' teaching can be found in the Old Testament in one form or another. What is radically new about His view of righteousness is its new motivation: "for my sake" (cf. 7:21-27), i.e. because the demands made are authoritative and final because of Jesus' authority. Everything depends upon accepting Jesus as the Christ, and having His power to live the kind of life described herein. Otherwise, everything falls back into a legalistic, hence, impossible, concept of righteousness. The standard is no longer a codified one, but God's own character, the goal for which He furnishes the Spirit to help us surpass the evil that dominates us (5:48). Only this kind of righteousness will surpass that of the sterile religionists and bring glory to God (5:10, 20). But it is a way to travel, an attitude to pursue, rather than a virtue intrinsic to discipleship. It is a search (6:33). Man is blessed in the measure he desires it (5:6).
3. The Lord's Prayer (6:9, 10) asks that God manifest His holiness, rule and will on earth, all in perfect harmony with the expectations created by the Old Testament doctrine of the Messianic age. The kind of righteousness Jesus has in mind, then, is that attitude which sanctifies God, seeks first His Kingdom and His righteousness and does His will (6:33).
4. There is no necessary separation between the concerns of the Kingdom of God and those of life lived on this earth, no false dichotomy between spirit and matter. While much Jewish apocalyptic had pictured a materialistic Kingdom, Jesus pictures it as something to be spiritually understood and appreciated. While other Jews prepared for a purely spiritual Kingdom with no

## THE KIND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS GOD HAS IN MIND

earthly reality, Jesus recognized the human situation that is to continue until the end of the world, a situation in which God's people will need food, clothing and shelter, just like all men anywhere (6:24-34). The difference, however, is in what each chooses as his personal preoccupation: desire to please the Heavenly Father, or worry about personal needs.

5. The patterns of piety under the Old Testament system are definitely old, out-moded, worn, however useful in their time, but definitely to be substituted with new forms, new content (9:14-17). The wedding-joy of the Messianic Kingdom must not be marred by the severe piety that rightly characterized pre-messianic times. Jesus is not merely reforming Judaism with its legal system, but making a qualitative leap into a new relationship with God.
6. Righteousness, i.e. right thinking and doing, then, according to Jesus, means coming to Him, believing in Him, studying in His school, receiving peace of soul from Him alone (11:28-30). The life-style pictured for the disciple cannot be divorced from the Christology of Matthew, because the invitations to enter into the Kingdom of God are intimately associated with invitations to embrace the person of Jesus Christ the King.
7. This submission to God's will as it is revealed in Jesus means denying oneself for His sake and willingly accepting any suffering encountered in the line of duty for which all must answer to Jesus (16:24-28).
8. Righteousness, in Jesus' eyes, does not seek control over others nor promotes self-importance (18:1-35). Rather, real righteousness is humble, concerned about others' weaknesses and welfare and problems, dedicated to restoring harmony among men, and aware of its own need of God's mercy. (Cf. also 19:13-15.)
9. Righteousness, as Jesus defines it, does not seek easy escape from marital responsibility (19:3-9).
10. Righteousness not only does not hinder those weaker than oneself, but seeks to become like them in humility (19:13-15).
11. Perfection is a question of removing everything that would hinder perfect service to God and others (19:16-30). Strikingly, this answer is given to answer the request: "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?"
12. Righteousness does not depend upon one's own merits or efforts, but upon the free choice and generosity of God (20:1-16).
13. Righteousness does not express itself in self-seeking preeminence

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and priority over others, but in self-giving service for others (20:20-28).

14. Real righteousness does not consist in professing allegiance to God yet without producing the results that this allegiance should produce (21:18-22, 28—22:14).
15. All of religion and ethics may be expressed in the two great commandments (22:34-40).
16. True religion consists in doing and teaching what God has ordered, regardless of the hypocrisy obvious in the life of those who occupy the teaching position (23:2, 3).
17. Righteousness consists in humble recognition of our equality under Christ our only superior (23:8-12). True greatness is measured by service.
18. The “weightier matters of the law (are) justice, mercy and faith,” although the positive ordinances are not to be neglected either (23:23).
19. The kind of righteousness Jesus has in mind is not a settled question, in the sense that any disciple can think himself to possess it perfectly. Rather, it is a life to be lived every day in the shadow of the real possibility of losing it (24:12, 13). It is a life lived under the daily tension of constant preparedness for whatever events signal the end for each one (24:42—25:13). It involved a proper utilization of the Lord’s goods left in our custody (25:14-30). Every earthly decision involves our taking a position in the presence of God and Christ the Judge (25:31-46). The Christian ethic is not simply contemplative, but is highly practical, and by which all will be judged: did your trust of the Messiah make you generously helpful with your fellowman?

## THE PARTICIPATION OF THE GENTILES IN THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

The Gentiles are a special class to themselves, whose reaction to Jesus deserves special note. In fact, although Matthew mentions none among Jesus' regular disciples or enemies, because His mission was principally to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," he does purposely include numerous mentions of them all in a favorable sense. The only significant negative Gentile personages are Pontius Pilate and his wife who figure in Jesus' trials, and while not pictured as particularly believers, both underline Jesus' innocence in different ways (27:18, 19, 24). Pilate's final decision to protect himself rather than an innocent man, needs no comment. The soldiers of the battalion that mocked Jesus (27:27-31) are negative, minor figures as are also the soldiers at the tomb who became involuntary witnesses to the reality of Jesus' resurrection (27:62-66; 28:11-15).

Consider, however, the following positive, deliberately apologetic instances Matthew included to show that the Messianic Kingdom, rightly understood, is open to everyone, regardless of birth, race, language or national background:

1. At least three of the four women mentioned in Jesus' genealogy are Gentiles: Rahab the Canaanite (Josh. 2:11; Heb. 11:31); Ruth the Moabitess (Ruth 1:16f.; 2:12); Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite (II Sam. 11; I Kings 15:5). The Messiah cannot be a pure-blood Hebrew: He is part pagan by unquestionable genealogy.
2. The adoration by the Magi, standing in stark contrast to the indifference of Jerusalem and the clergy and the suspicions of a murderous king, points to a Messiah whose mission concerns not only Israel, but all peoples (2:1-12).
3. John the Baptist preached: "God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" and insisted that repentance and righteousness are the essential qualities for participation in the Messianic Kingdom (3:1-10). If fleshly descent from Abraham is clearly subordinate to spiritual kinship to Abraham through faith and obedience to God, then, the logical conclusion may well be that even non-Hebrews will be permitted to share in the Messianic Kingdom on this same basis.
4. The universality of the Messiah's ministry is underlined by Matthew's quotation of Isaiah 9:1, 2 linking Jesus' ministry in "Galilee of the Gentiles" with the already well-attested prophecy that

had already sung of God's concern for the benighted pagans (4:12-17).

5. Remarkable for its absence in all of Jesus' teaching is any blessing of Israel above all other nations, any special honor given to uniquely Jewish practices, rites or customs; circumcision.
6. Unhesitatingly, Jesus blessed and praised the Gentile centurion of Capernaum and unblushingly stated Gentile participation in the Kingdom banquet to the exclusion of privileged Jews (8:5-13).
7. The account of the Syro-phoenician woman—herself a CANAANITE—underlines most vigorously the high quality of the faith of Gentiles when once brought into living contact with Christ and His message.
8. The participation of a half-Jewish, half-pagan population of Decapolis at the second miraculous multiplication of food, subtly underlines their common participation at the Messianic banquet (15:29-39; cf. Mark 7:31; 8:1-10).
9. In the parable of the wicked husbandmen, Jesus affirms: "The Kingdom of God will be taken away from you (Jewish leaders especially) and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (21:43). The new nation would not be merely Gentile, but a new people of Gentile-Jewish extraction who love and serve Jesus.
10. In the parable of the marriage feast, the King, angered by those who were invited and had rejected His invitation, destroyed those murderers and burned their city, because "they were unworthy," and ordered His servants to bring in just anyone they could find (22:1-14). The evident allusion is to the destruction of Jerusalem and the privileged Jews who should have been most ready to accept God's invitation. Nevertheless, the non-Jews are offered the same privileges, but must not presume upon God's grace. (Cf. Rom. 11:22.)
11. "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations" (24:14)!
12. The Judgment of Christ, at which all nations will be gathered, separated and judged, will be settled, not on the basis of one's Jewishness, but on the basis of each one's usefulness in helping "the least of Christ's brethren" (25:31-46).
13. The kindness of Mary of Bethany in anointing Jesus for His burial "will be told in memory of her, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world" (26:13).

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14. Pilate's wife was the only voice urgently raised to protest Jesus' innocence at His trial before the Gentile court.
15. A Gentile centurion at the crucifixion is the only non-disciple quoted by Matthew as having made a statement favorable to Jesus: "Truly this was God's son" (27:54)!
16. In virtue of Jesus' universal authority, all nations are to be evangelized and discipled (28:18-20).

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