

The Lord  
Is My  
Shepherd



## The Lord Is My Shepherd

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# Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to my spiritual mentor the late Frank Luckman.

He came into my life when I was growing in my spiritual journey. Through weekly Bible studies and personal conversation, Frank always amazed and inspired me with his deep understanding of the Word of God.

We are kindred spirits and I am forever grateful to have known and learned from this great man. Our friendship was brief, as he left us too soon, but his impact on me has been and continues to be life changing.

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Finally, all text that has been referenced from the Holy Bible within this book has been copied from the World English Bible translation. This version of the Holy Bible is a free version that permits quoting the text freely without express written permission from the publisher. The World English Bible is a translation of the Holy Bible based on the American Standard Version 1901 Bible, Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia Old Testament, and Byzantine Majority Text New Testament. I would encourage anyone to pick up a copy of this accessible translation to help support the efforts of the team of volunteers who translated this wonderful version.

# Introduction

This book is about the history and teachings of a man named Jesus. It includes the complete text found in the Chapters of an ancient book called Matthew. The book of Matthew was written by a man named Matthew who was a close friend and follower of Jesus; and he was therefore able to provide a firsthand account of the experiences and teachings of Jesus.

The Chapters of Matthew have been numbered by verses, to make it easy to reference specific sections of text within each Chapter. In most cases, the Chapters of Matthew have been broken down further into sections, and each section is followed by reflections and considerations to help understand the text. In many cases, Matthew's text is further supported by content from other ancient books of Scripture. This supporting content, where provided, is included within the reflections as well.

The purpose of the reflections in this book are to help the reader understand Matthew's text. The purpose of the considerations are to help the interested reader understand how Jesus' teachings can be applied to daily life.

Jesus is also known as the "Christ" which is a Greek word and when translated into English means the "Anointed One".

# Historical Background

The ancient Book of Genesis records the history of a man named Abram. It is written that God spoke to Abram and said; **"Leave your country, and your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and I will curse him who curses you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."** Further on in the Book of Genesis, God made Abram a promise saying: **"Look now toward the sky, and count the stars, if you are able to count them. So will your offspring be."** It is written that Abram **"believed in God"** and because of his belief, God **"credited it to him for righteousness."**

God made a covenant with Abram to provide him with a promised land as an inheritance for his offspring. Later God spoke to Abram again regarding this covenant, saying; **"As for me, behold, my covenant is with you. You will be the father of a multitude of nations. Your name will no more be called Abram, but your name will be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you. Kings will come out of you. I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your offspring after you."**

Abraham had one son named Ishmael, and God told Abraham **"Sarah your wife, will bear you a son. You shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him."** Abraham asked about Ishmael, and God replied; **"As for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiple him exceedingly."**

Abraham and Sarah did then have a son and they called him Isaac, just as God had told Abraham to. The descendants of Isaac became the people of Israel and the descendants of Ishmael became the people of Islam.

Isaac had a son named Jacob and it is written that one day God spoke to Jacob and said; **"Your name shall not be Jacob any more, but your name will be Israel. God said to him, I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations will be from you, and kings will come out of your body. The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and to your offspring after you will I give the land."** Jacob had a total of twelve sons, and each one of his sons became the heads of twelve tribes, who became the ancestors of the people of Israel.

One of Jacob's sons, whose name was Joseph, was despised by his other brothers, and they sold him to merchants who took him away to Egypt. Through a series of



events that happened to Joseph while he was in Egypt, he became a powerful man, second only to the Pharaoh of Egypt himself. Joseph commanded and governed over all of Egypt. A great famine affected the whole earth, but through Joseph's wise food management practices, the Egyptians had stored enough grain to overcome the famine. Through another series of events, Joseph brought his father Jacob, his brothers and all of their families and possessions into Egypt, to live and survive through that famine. Once again, God spoke to Jacob in a dream saying, **"Don't be afraid to go down into Egypt, for there I will make of you a great nation. I will go down with you into Egypt. I will also surely bring you up again."**

In the years following Joseph's death, these ancestors of Jacob became the people of Israel, and they multiplied abundantly, filling the land of Egypt and growing exceedingly mighty. This concerned the ruling Pharaoh of the time, and so the Egyptians made the people of Israel their servants, and ruthlessly ruled over them. Even so, the Israelites continued to multiply, until the Pharaoh commanded that his people throw all newborn male Israelite babies into the river. One day, one of the Pharaoh's daughters was bathing in the river, and she saw an Israelite baby boy floating in a basket. She had compassion for the child and asked an Israelite woman to find his mother for her. The woman found the child's mother and brought her to the Pharaoh's daughter, who then said **"Take this child away, and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages."** As the child grew up, his mother returned him to the Pharaoh's daughter to become her son. She called the boy Moses and he lived among the Egyptians.

Moses became aware of the burdens that were being placed upon his blood relations, the enslaved people of Israel, and in a state of rage, Moses killed an Egyptian. When the Pharaoh of Egypt heard about this, he turned against Moses and intended to kill him. Moses fled from the Pharaoh and went to live in a land called Midian. During his time there, God spoke to Moses and asked him to return to Egypt, to lead the people of Israel out of bondage and into the land that God had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses returned to Egypt to confront the Pharaoh and plead with him to let the Israelite people go. The Pharaoh rejected Moses request, and so Moses warned that plagues would come upon the Egyptians until the Israelites were set free. From that point on, God performed a series of destructive plagues upon the Egyptian people. Finally the Pharaoh reluctantly agreed and let Moses lead the Israelites out of Egypt, toward the promised land.

Approximately 40 years later, they settled in the land that God originally promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Israelites were a great population of people, all of whom descended from the original twelve sons of Jacob, known as the twelve tribes of Israel. God spoke to Moses, and commanded that the promised land be divided up and given to each tribe according to their families, in the form of an inheritance. Over the next several hundred years the tribes of Israel fought wars against surrounding nations. Many times, the people of Israel turned away from God and did that which was evil in the sight of God. During those times the Israelites became captives under the rule of opposing nations. Yet, whenever they cried out to God in

their captivity and suffering, God would deliver them out of their bondage. This turning away from God and then returning back to God became a common pattern for the Israelite people.

In an ancient Book called 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, it is written that a prophet named Samuel became one of the judges for the people of Israel. In Chapter 8 of that Book, the elders of Israel approached Samuel and asked him to **"Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."** This request bothered Samuel greatly, because it meant that the people of Israel had turned their faith away from God, by asking for a king to rule over them, rather than looking to God as their ruler. Samuel prayed about their request to God, who answered him saying: **"Listen to the voice of the people in all that they tell you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me as the king over them. According to all the works they have done since the day that I have brought them out of Egypt even to this day, in that they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so they also do to you."** So, through God's direction, Samuel anointed a man named Saul to become the first ruling king over the people of Israel.

Saul was known to be a good man and it was written that **"there was not among the children of Israel a better person than he."** Saul reigned over Israel for 42 years, but during his reign he too turned to his own way and disobeyed God. In the Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, Chapter 15, it is written how Saul disobeyed God, and because of his disobedience, God then rejected Saul from continuing as the ruling king over Israel.

### **Ancient Prophecy of King David's Reign Forever**

During the time of King Saul's reign, a shepherd boy named David believed in and loved God with all his heart. In the Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, Chapter 16, Verses 1-14, it is written that God told the prophet Samuel to go to Bethlehem and anoint this shepherd boy David to become God's new King on earth.

Later in an ancient Book called 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, Chapter 7, Verse 12-16, it is written that when David was the King, Nathan who was a prophet at that time, had a dream where God told Nathan to tell King David that: **"When your days are fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who shall proceed out of your bowels, and I will establish His Kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of His Kingdom forever. I will be His father, and He shall be my Son. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever."** This prophecy predicted that God would one day provide a son, who would be a descendant of the line of King David and would establish a Kingdom that would reign forever.

In addition to this prophecy, another prophet named Isaiah also later predicted that a son would one day come from the line of King David to establish a Kingdom

forever. This prophecy is found in the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 9, Verse 6-7, where he wrote: **"For to us a child is born. To us a Son is given; and the government will be on His shoulders. His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end, on the throne of David, and on His Kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from that time on, even forever."**

For several hundred years after King David had died, the history of the people of Israel was known as the "period of the kings." Throughout their history, the Israelite people and their Kings, continued the pattern of turning away from and then returning back to God.

Approximately 1000 years after King David's death, a man named Jesus was born and He was an ancestor from the line of King David. The remainder of this book's content provides the history and teachings of Jesus, as recorded in the ancient Book of Matthew and supported by several other ancient Books of Scripture. Reflections and considerations on Matthew's text have been provided to help understand the meaning.

# Ancestry of Jesus

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 1

1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.  
2 Abraham became the father of Isaac. Isaac became the father of Jacob. Jacob became the father of Judah and his brothers. 3 Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron. Hezron became the father of Ram. 4 Ram became the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon. Nahshon became the father of Salmon. 5 Salmon became the father of Boaz by Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed by Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse. 6 Jesse became the father of King David. David became the father of Solomon by her who had been Uriah's wife. 7 Solomon became the father of Rehoboam. Rehoboam became the father of Abijah. Abijah became the father of Asa. 8 Asa became the father of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat became the father of Joram. Joram became the father of Uzziah. 9 Uzziah became the father of Jotham. Jotham became the father of Ahaz. Ahaz became the father of Hezekiah. 10 Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh. Manasseh became the father of Amon. Amon became the father of Josiah. 11 Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the exile to Babylon. 12 After the exile to Babylon, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel. Shealtiel became the father of Zerubbabel. 13 Zerubbabel became the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim. Eliakim became the father of Azor. 14 Azor became the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim. Achim became the father of Eliud. 15 Eliud became the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan. Matthan became the father of Jacob. 16 Jacob became the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus,† who is called Christ. 17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the exile to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the carrying away to Babylon to the Christ, fourteen generations.

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was like this: After his mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, before they came together, she was found pregnant by the Holy Spirit. 19 Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, intended to put her away secretly. 20 But when he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take to yourself Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 She shall give birth to a son. You shall call his name Jesus, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins."

22 Now all this has happened that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall give birth to a son. They shall call his name Immanuel;" which is, being interpreted, "God with us."

24 Joseph arose from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took his wife to himself; 25 and didn't know her sexually until she had given birth to her firstborn son. He named him Jesus.



## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 1

1) The Book of Matthew began with the following sentence, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham", and then it goes on to trace the bloodline of Jesus' forefathers, from Abraham right up to Jesus' birth. These details document that Jesus was descended from both Abraham and King David.

2) In this Chapter, Jesus is referred to as "Christ" and today He is still known as "Jesus Christ." The word "Christ" is a Greek word for the Hebrew word "Messiah", which translated means "Anointed One." The Israelite people believed in and had long awaited the arrival of their "Messiah"; who would be a king or high priest, anointed by God, physically descended from King David, and would lead the people of Israel. Jesus' ancestry reveals that He was descended from the line of King David, and the fact that He is referred to as "Christ" indicates that He was also considered to be a King or high priest anointed by God. The ancient prophecies, mentioned in this book's introduction, predicted that a king would come from the line of King David, which aligns with Jesus' genealogy.

3) This Chapter traces Jesus' genealogy from King David to His earthly father Joseph. However, in the Book of Luke, Chapter 3, Verses 23-38, the genealogy of Jesus' mother is also traced back to King David. Therefore, both Jesus' earthly parents are directly descended from the line of King David.

4) In this Chapter, Matthew wrote that a prophecy was fulfilled when Mary, who was a virgin, became pregnant through the Holy Spirit of God. This prophecy can be found in the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 7, Verse 14, where it is written **"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."** The Hebrew name **"Immanuel"** when translated into English means "God with us."

5) In Verse 18 of this Chapter, it is written that Mary **"was found pregnant by the Holy Spirit"**, and later in Verse 20, it is written that an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, and told him **"that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."** Therefore, Mary's pregnancy was accomplished through the Holy Spirit. Detailed reflections on the **"Holy Spirit"** will be provided in future Chapters.

# The Birth of Jesus – Part I

*This section details the birth of Jesus in three parts. For this purpose, verses are taken from the Book of Matthew, Chapters 1 & 2, and from the Book of Luke, Chapters 1 & 2. These two Books, taken together, provide a complete historic picture of Jesus' birth. These verses have been combined together chronologically so that each of the events are presented in their appropriate order.*

Now in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. Having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, you highly favored one! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women!"

But when she saw him, she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered what kind of salutation this might be. The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and will call his name 'Jesus.' He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. There will be no end to his Kingdom."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, seeing I am a virgin?"

The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore also the holy one who is born from you will be called the Son of God. Behold, Elizabeth, your relative, also has conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing spoken by God is impossible." Mary said, "Behold, the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word."

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was like this; After his mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, before they came together, she was found pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, intended to put her away secretly. But when he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take to yourself Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She shall give birth to a son. You shall call his name Jesus, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins." Now all this has happened, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall give birth to a son. They shall call his name Immanuel"; which is, being interpreted, "God with us." Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took his wife to himself; and didn't know her sexually until she had given birth to her firstborn son. He named him Jesus.

Now in those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to enroll themselves, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to David's city, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David; to enroll himself with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him as wife, being pregnant.

While they were there, the day had come for her to give birth. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a feeding trough, because there was no room for them in the inn. There were shepherds in the same country staying in the field, and keeping watch by night over their flock. Behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. The angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be to all the people. For there is born to you today, in David's city, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This is the sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a feeding trough." Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men."

When the angels went away from them into the sky, the shepherds said one to another, "Let's go to Bethlehem, now, and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." They came with haste, and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby was lying in the feeding trough. When they saw it, they publicized widely the saying which was spoken to them about this child. All who heard it wondered at the things which were spoken to them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, just as it was told them.

### **Reflections on the Birth of Jesus Part I**

1) Both Mary and Joseph were told to name the baby "Jesus." The name "Jesus" is the English translation of the Greek name Yesous, which represents the Hebrew name Yeshua, which in turn, is a short form version of the name Yehoshua. "Yehoshua", which when translated into English means "God Saves", "God Delivers" and "God Rescues."

2) It is written that an Angel told Mary, concerning her son Jesus, that "**The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. There will be no end to his Kingdom.**" In the introduction, two ancient prophecies were mentioned which predicted that an everlasting Kingdom would come from the line of King David. These words, spoken to Mary by the Angel, point toward Jesus as the one to fulfill those prophecies.

3) An Angel announced Jesus' birth to shepherds who were among the lowest ranking members of society at the time, yet King David's humble beginnings were those of a shepherd boy as well. Jesus would later refer to himself as "the good shepherd." In the ancient Book of John, Chapter 10, Verses 14-15, it is written that

Jesus said "**I am the good Shepherd, I know my own, and I'm known by my own.**"

4) Jesus' birth happened in a humble place without any worldly comforts, and the fact that there wasn't any room available for Him at the local inn revealed that Jesus would not receive any special treatment from humanity right from His birth.

## The Birth of Jesus - Part II

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east, and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he asked them where the Christ would be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is written through the prophet, "You Bethlehem, land of Judah, are in no way least among the princes of Judah: for out of you shall come a governor, who shall shepherd my people, Israel."

Then Herod secretly called the wise men, and learned from them exactly what time the star appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and search diligently for the young child. When you have found him, bring me word, so that I also may come and worship him."

They, having heard the king, went their way; and behold, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. They came into the house and saw the young child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Opening their treasures, they offered to him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Being warned in a dream that they shouldn't return to Herod, they went back to their own country another way.

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him." He arose and took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

### Reflections on The Birth of Jesus Part II

1) Herod asked the chief priests and scribes "**where the Christ would be born**", and they answered him that it would be "**In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is written through the prophet.**" The prophecy that they were referring to can be found in the ancient Book of Micah, Chapter 5, Verse 2 where the prophet Micah wrote: "**But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, being small among the clans of Judah, out of you one will come out to me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings out are from of old, from ancient times.**" Therefore, the birthplace of Jesus, was the same place where "**the Christ**" (or the Messiah) birth place was predicted to be in that ancient prophecy.

2) Jesus birth in Bethlehem fulfilled the ancient prophecy; however, the circumstances that occurred in order for this to happen were incredible. In order for

Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, His mother Mary, who lived in Nazareth, would somehow have to get there. The decree of enrollment from Caesar Augustus required everyone to return to their place of birth in order to be counted. Therefore, Joseph, who was originally from Bethlehem, was forced to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem with his wife Mary, and in doing so, they arrived exactly at the right time for Mary to give birth to Jesus.

3) A phenomenon of the universe was required for a star to shine directly over Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth, and as such, this phenomenon showcased Jesus' birth as a glorious event. It is written that the wise men followed this star a great distance, expecting that they would find a "**King of the Jews**", to honor and worship. As a result of their faith and trust in this star, they were able to find Jesus, and they did indeed worship and honor Him as a King.

4) King Herod asked the wise men to search for the child and then send back word to him, so he could find and "**worship him**" too. In this request, we can see the craftiness of this king, because he had no intention of worshiping Jesus at all. King Herod was appointed as the ruling king of Judea by the Romans to control Judea under Roman rule. The wise men had referred to the child as "**he who is born King of the Jews**", therefore, his intentions would have been to destroy Jesus, rather than to "worship" him as a King, because he himself was king.

5) The dream warning the wise men not to tell Herod where Jesus was, and the angel's warning in Joseph's dream, to flee into Egypt for safety, reveal that Jesus' fate was unusually protected. These also reveal that, even from His birth, Jesus was exposed to great dangers, and from the very beginning He would be persecuted.

6) Matthew wrote that "**Out of Egypt I called my son**" refers to the fulfillment of another prophecy about Jesus, when He would later be taken out of Egypt. Jesus lived in Egypt until King Herod died, and in part 3 of the Birth of Jesus, it is recorded that after King Herod's death, the Angel of God appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to take the young child and his mother out of Egypt and go into the land of Israel. This prophecy that Matthew referred to can be found in the ancient Book of Hosea, Chapter 11, Verse 1, where the complete Verse is actually written as follows: "**When Israel was a child then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.**" Therefore, the prophet Hosea not only referred to a son but that he would also be a child who would come out of Egypt, which aligned with Jesus' experience.

## **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) It is interesting to note that the men who came from the east, who had come to worship Jesus as King, are referred to as "wise" men.

2) People can be very misleading, and King Herod provided us with an example of this when he said that he wanted to worship Jesus. Therefore, not everything that people say is exactly what they mean.

## The Birth of Jesus - Part III

Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked by the wise men, was exceedingly angry, and sent out, and killed all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding countryside, from two years old and under, according to the exact time which he had learned from the wise men. Then that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; she wouldn't be comforted, because they are no more." But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Arise and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel, for those who sought the young child's life are dead." He arose and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the place of his father, Herod, he was afraid to go there. Being warned in a dream, he withdrew into the region of Galilee, and came and lived in a city called Nazareth; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

### Reflections on The Birth of Jesus Part III

1) By ordering all male children that were two years old and under to be killed, in Bethlehem and the surrounding area, we see the ruthless brutality of King Herod in his attempt to kill Jesus. We also see that Herod's plan was defeated, and that his attempt to eliminate Jesus was miraculously prevented through directions from the Angel of the Lord being given to Joseph in his dream, as was reflected in Part 2 of The Birth of Jesus.

2) Matthew referred to a prophecy from Jeremiah as being fulfilled when king Herod killed the male children of Bethlehem. This is found in the ancient Book of Jeremiah, Chapter 31, Verse 15, where the prophet Jeremiah wrote: "**A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.**" This is a complex prophecy and the following explanation is provided to help interpret the meaning of it: In the ancient Book of Genesis, it is written that Rachel was the wife of Jacob. Jacob was the father of the twelve males who became the heads of the twelve tribes that made up the people of Israel. It is recorded in Genesis that Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin (the 12<sup>th</sup> male) on her way to Bethlehem. Later in the ancient Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, it is written that Rachel's tomb is located near to Ramah. So, when Matthew referred to Rachel weeping in Ramah, we see that she is weeping from her grave in Ramah, as she looks toward Bethlehem at the slaughter that is happening to the children of Israel. What Matthew does not reference though, are the Verses that immediately follow Jeremiah 31, Verse 15, which say: "**Yahweh says: "Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears" ... "There is hope for your latter end," says Yahweh. "Your children will come again to their own territory.**" Yes, the first part of this prophecy does predict the great tragedy in



Bethlehem, but the second part provides hope and a promise that the children will be redeemed. Therefore, the complete prophecy is both tragic and hopeful. We will reflect more about that promise in the coming Chapters.

3) After Herod's death, the angel of the Lord once again appeared to Joseph in a dream, to direct him to take Jesus out of Egypt and into the land of Israel. However, due to the continued threat from Herod's son and to further direction in a dream, Jesus was brought to live in the city of Nazareth, to become a "Nazarene", which Matthew wrote fulfilled another ancient prophecy. However, Matthew's statement **"that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets: He will be called a Nazarene"** is not specifically written in the ancient Books of Scripture. Matthew does not state that it was written, but instead, that it was **"spoken through the prophets."** In those times, many prophecies were passed along through the spoken word and not always written down.

That said, the prophet Isaiah predicted in Isaiah, Chapter 11, Verses 1-2 **"A shoot will come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots will bear fruit. Yahweh's Spirit will rest on him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh."**

This prophecy is widely accepted as predicting the coming of the Jewish Messiah. **Jesse** was the name of King David's father, and this prophecy states that a **"branch"** will come from his roots and bear fruit. The term **"branch"** was written in the original Hebrew text as "Netzer". The town where Jesus grew up in was called "Natserset" (translated as Nazareth), and people from that town are referred to as being Nazarenes. There has been consideration made that the term Natserset was derived from the word Netzer. It may very well be that the prophet used Netzer for branch to predict Jesus' roots would be from Jesse, but it has also be suggested that Netzer offered a play on words to indicate Jesus would be predicted to come from Nazareth.

# Jesus' Youth

*In this section we look at the very few details recorded about Jesus' youth as recalled in the Book of Luke. After leaving Egypt, Jesus' family settled in the city of Nazareth. We have a few details about His early years, including a very notable event that happened when Jesus was twelve years old.*

## **The Book of Luke, Chapter 2, Verses 39-52**

39 When they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. 40 The child was growing, and was becoming strong in spirit, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. 41 His parents went every year to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover.

42 When he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast, 43 and when they had fulfilled the days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. Joseph and his mother didn't know it, 44 but supposing him to be in the company, they went a day's journey, and they looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances. 45 When they didn't find him, they returned to Jerusalem, looking for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the middle of the teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions. 47 All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 When they saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I were anxiously looking for you."

49 He said to them, "**Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?**" 50 They didn't understand the saying which he spoke to them. 51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth. He was subject to them, and his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

## **Reflections on Luke, Chapter 2, Verses 39-52**

1) Verse 39 begins with "**When they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord.**" This is a reference to specific laws that were required to be fulfilled whenever an Israelite baby boy had been born. We will reflect upon further details about "the law" in later Chapters.

2) Although we haven't been given too much detail, it is written that Jesus "**was becoming strong in spirit, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.**" Meaning that He was a very wise young person, whose spirit was strong, and that he was living in God's grace.

3) It is recorded that Jesus and His parents went to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Passover, which honors God in remembrance of how He saved the Israelite people from their slavery in Egypt. This was a religious celebration and so

Jesus would have been learning about God and the ancient Scriptures during each of those occasions. The event that happened when He was twelve, revealed that He was a serious student who astonished the teachers and all those around Him in His understanding of their teachings; and the fact that Jesus stayed behind for three days in the temple supports His keen interest in the ancient Scriptures.

4) His response to His parent's concern when they thought He was lost was "**Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?**" Jesus' reply reveals that He understood who He really was, in that His "Father" was not of this world, but rather, of the Heavenly realm.

5) After being reconnected with His parents in the temple, it is written that "**He went down with them, and came to Nazareth. He was subject to them.**" This reveals that even though He knew His true Father was God, He respected and honored His earthly parents as well.

# Jesus' Baptism

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 3

1 In those days, John the Baptizer came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" 3 For this is he who was spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make the way of the Lord ready! Make his paths straight!" 4 Now John himself wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then people from Jerusalem, all of Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him. 6 They were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, "You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore produce fruit worthy of repentance! 9 Don't think to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I tell you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 10 "Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire. 11 I indeed baptize you in water for repentance, but he who comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire." 13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John would have hindered him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?" 15 But Jesus, answering, said to him, "**Allow it now, for this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness.**" Then he allowed him. 16 Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. 17 Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 3

1) It is written that the preaching of John the Baptizer fulfilled a prophecy that was written by a prophet named Isaiah. This prophecy is found in the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 40, Verse 3, where he wrote: "**The voice of one who calls out, 'Prepare the way of Yahweh in the wilderness! Make a level highway in the desert for our God.'**" In this ancient prophecy, Isaiah was predicting that a messenger would one day come and call out in the wilderness to prepare people for the way of God. Matthew was here stating that John the Baptizer was that messenger, whom Isaiah had predicted would come. John the Baptizer did indeed live in the wilderness, and He did preach to people to prepare for the way of God. We will reflect more about the "**way of Yahweh**" in later Chapters. Isaiah was not the only prophet to predict that a messenger would come to prepare the way of God. In the ancient Book of Malachi, Chapter 3, Verse 1, it is also written: "**Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me; and the**

**Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, behold he comes!" says Yahweh of Armies."**

We will reflect more about **"the messenger of the covenant"**, included in this prophecy, in later Chapters too.

2) John said to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to be baptized by him **"Don't think to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I tell you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones."** In saying this, John was warning them that being descendants of Abraham does not guarantee that they will be accepted by God. **"These stones"** are a reference to people who are not descended from Abraham, and John was saying that God is able to raise them up to be His accepted people. John also said to them, that the key to becoming God's children is to **"produce fruit worthy of repentance!"** The term **"repentance"** refers to "having regret", and to **"product fruit"** refers to living in a way that is acceptable to God. Therefore, John's message to the Pharisees and Sadducees was to live in a way that was acceptable to God and to be genuinely regretful for the times when they were not. We will reflect more about the lifestyle of the Pharisees and Sadducees in later Chapters.

3) John continued his warning to them, saying **"every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire."** To be **"cut down, and cast into the fire"** was a warning to them that they would face an impending doom, because of their lifestyle. We will reflect more about **"the fire"** in later Chapters.

4) When John said **"I Indeed baptize you in water for repentance, but he who comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit."** Here John was referring to Jesus as the one who would come to baptize people in the Holy Spirit. The term "baptize" means "to be spiritually cleansed" or "purified." Therefore, John was saying that Jesus would be coming to spiritually cleanse or purify people through the Holy Spirit.

5) John then continued saying **"His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire."** The **"wheat"** represented the **"good fruit"** which are those people living according to God's will, and **"the chaff"** represented those who were not. John was telling them that Jesus would also come to separate people into two categories. We'll reflect more about this separation in later Chapters.

6) When Jesus approached John to be baptized, it is written that **"John would have hindered him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?'"** The term "hindered" means to "stop" or "prevent" something from happening. However, Jesus answered him saying, **"Allow it now, for this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness."** In saying this, Jesus revealed that it was necessary for John to baptize Jesus. And as a testimony to that, after Jesus was baptized, a voice

was heard from the Heavens saying, "**This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.**"

7) In Verse 16, when John baptized Jesus, it is written "**Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him.**" Then it is written that John "**saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him.**" Here John is recorded as witnessing the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus, which would then enable Jesus to baptize people in the Holy Spirit, just as John predicted.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) John was preaching to "**Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!**" In saying these words, John was calling people to be regretful for living sinful lives, and asking them to turn away from sin. The reason John said this was because "**the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!**" The term "**at hand**" refers to something "attainable" or "accessible." Therefore, John's message was to regret and turn away from sin, because in doing so, the Kingdom of Heaven would become accessible.

2) The Pharisees and Sadducees believed that being ancestors of Abraham entitled them to be accepted by God. John's message, however, reveals that all people can be accepted by God, and it is not necessary to have been descended from Abraham.

# Tempting Jesus

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 4, Verses 1-11

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry afterward. 3 The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

4 But he answered, **"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."**

5 Then the devil took him into the holy city. He set him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you.' and, 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you don't dash your foot against a stone.'" 7 Jesus said to him, **"Again, it is written, You shall not test the Lord, your God."** 8 Again, the devil took him to an exceedingly high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory. 9 He said to him, "I will give you all of these things, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, **"Get behind me, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and you shall serve him only."**

11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and served him.

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 4, Verses 1-11

1) This Chapter began with **"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil"**, and He fasted in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. The "Spirit" once again refers to the "Holy Spirit", and so Jesus was being led into temptation by the Holy Spirit. This may be confusing as to why the Holy Spirit would do this to Jesus. However, it would have been God's will that Jesus be subjected to and go through the experience of being tempted by the devil. In the following reflections, we will see how Jesus' temptations were actually predicted in ancient Books of Scripture.

The devil's plan was to tempt Jesus to turn Him away from God. However, Jesus actually responded to the devil's temptations by quoting God's Word from ancient Scripture. The following reflections reference the ancient Scriptures that Jesus quoted:

1) Jesus' first quote was from a section of scripture found in the ancient Book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 8, Verse 3, when he said, **"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."** However, if we add Verse 2 together with this Verse 3, we can see how these two combined Verses actually compare with and foretell of Jesus' first temptation. This is what is written in Verses 2 and 3 of Deuteronomy, Chapter 8: **"You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether**

**you would keep his commandments, or not. He humbled you, and allowed you to be hungry, and fed you with manna, which you didn't know, neither did your fathers know; that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord."**

II) Jesus' second quote was from a section of Chapter 6, Verse 16, from the ancient Book of Deuteronomy, when Jesus said, "**You shall not test the Lord, your God.**" The full Verse, however, is written as follows: "**You shall not tempt the Lord your God, as you tempted him in Massah.**" This second half of the Verse, which Jesus does not mention, is very important because it reflects Jesus' response to this second temptation. We find out about "Massah" in the ancient Book of Exodus, Chapter 17, Verse 7, where it is written that Moses, who was a holy man leading God's chosen people through the wilderness, named a place Massah because his people had tested God by questioning whether God was with them or not. Exodus, Verse 7, is written as follows: "**He called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because the children of Israel quarreled, and because they tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?"**" Therefore, this Verse points directly toward Jesus, because He knew that God was with Him through His temptation.

III) The third quote that Jesus referred to was when He said, "**You shall worship the Lord your God, and you shall serve him only.**" This quote can be found in many places of ancient Scripture, where God told people not to worship or serve any other God than Him. However, one very significant reference, is found in the ancient Book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 5, where God spoke directly to Moses and gave him ten commandments. The very first commandment is recorded as "**You shall have no other gods before me.**" and then continues "**You shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them; for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God.**" This final quotation drove the devil away, because Jesus was following that commandment, and would not bow down to worship him.

## **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) If Jesus Himself was tempted, then we should not be surprised if we are also exposed to various temptations too. Jesus provided us with an example to follow when he quoted the ancient scriptures, which revealed that temptations can be defeated and overcome through the power of the Word of God.

2) Understanding that the Word of God gives us power to overcome temptation can encourage us to spend time reading, learning and turning to the Word of God for strength against the temptations that we may face.

3) In Jesus' second temptation, He marvelously used the portion of Deuteronomy to point us toward the Verse in Exodus, so that we can understand that He knew that God was with Him during His time of temptation.



## Jesus' Ministry Begins

*The following Chapters now record Jesus' life and teachings from the beginning of His ministry. In the ancient Book of Luke, Chapter 3, Verse 23, it is written that "**Jesus himself, when he began to teach, was about thirty years old.**" It has been widely accepted that His ministry lasted approximately three and a half years.*

# A Great Light – Healing the Sick

## The Book of Matthew Chapter 4, Verses 12-25

12 Now when Jesus heard that John was delivered up, he withdrew into Galilee. 13 Leaving Nazareth, he came and lived in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, 15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, 16 the people who sat in darkness saw a great light, to those who sat in the region and shadow of death, to them light has dawned." 17 From that time, Jesus began to preach, and to say, "**Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.**" 18 Walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers: Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 He said to them, "**Come after me, and I will make you fishers for men.**" 20 They immediately left their nets and followed him. 21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them. 22 They immediately left the boat and their father, and followed him. 23 Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people. 24 The report about him went out into all Syria. They brought to him all who were sick, afflicted with various diseases and torments, possessed with demons, epileptics, and paralytics; and he healed them. 25 Great multitudes from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and from beyond the Jordan followed him.

## Reflections on Matthew Chapter 4, Verses 12-25

1) Matthew wrote that another prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus when he came to live in Capernaum. The prophet Isaiah predicted the specific region and area where people would be living and would one day see "**a great light.**" This prophecy was about Jesus who would come to be among those people in that area and teach them about the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus spiritually opened their eyes to a truth which they would not have known before Jesus had visited them. Isaiah used a comparison of people walking in darkness, then having a great light shine upon them to describe Jesus' teachings. The light was God's truth that Jesus revealed to them. Here is what is written in the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 9, Verses 1-2" "**But there shall be no more gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time, he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the latter time he has made it glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who lived in the land of the shadow of death, on them the light has shined.**"

2) Jesus began His Ministry in Galilee by preaching to the people to "**Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.**" This is exactly what John the Baptist had been preaching as well.

3) While walking by the sea of Galilee, Jesus met with 2 men named Andrew and Simon, and it is written that Jesus called Simon "Peter." We will reflect on why Jesus called Simon "Peter" later in this book. Jesus said to them "**Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.**" Jesus chose these men who had been raised by their families to be fisherman. Yet, when He called them, they changed their life paths without hesitation and followed Him.

4) It is written that Jesus taught in the people's synagogues across all of Galilee about God's Kingdom, and He cured multitudes of people who were brought to Him. As a result, it is recorded that many people followed Him.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus began His Ministry in Galilee by preaching to the people "**Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.**" This is the same message that John the Baptist was preaching as well. In Chapter 3, it was reflected that to "**repent**" refers to "having regret" and the term "**at hand**" refers to something "attainable" or "accessible." These words were a calling people to be regretful for living sinful lives, and asking them to turn away from sin, because in doing so, the Kingdom of Heaven would become accessible for them.

This calling then reveals that sincere repentance to God is necessary, and that in doing so, we too can have access to the Kingdom of Heaven, which is nearer to us than we understand.

2) When Jesus chose the fisherman, He called them to follow Him and offered to make them "**fishers for men.**" They immediately responded and followed His offer in faith. In the same way, many of us may experience a sense of being called to follow God in our own lives. If so, we are being given an opportunity to accept God's calling and follow in faith the plan that God has for our lives too.

# The Sermon On The Mount

*This Chapter of the Book of Matthew and the following Chapters 6 and 7, record a sermon that Jesus gave on a mountainside to His disciples and a multitude of people who had come to hear him speak. These teachings are primarily instructions for living according to God's will, and this event is commonly known as "The Sermon on the Mount."*

## The Beatitudes

*The first twelve Verses of this sermon are referred to as the "Beatitudes." Since each of the "Beatitude" Verses provide a unique teaching, individual reflections have been provided after each one.*

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses 1-12 & reflections

1 Seeing the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 He opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

3 **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."**

To be "**poor in spirit**" means to be lacking spiritual faith in God. Spiritual fullness begins from spiritual poverty. Therefore, Jesus may have been referring to the blessing that people receive, once they realize that their lives are spiritually poor and disconnected from God, but then decide to put their faith in Him. Jesus previously taught to "**Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand**" which meant that Heaven is available to all who sincerely repent for their sins and turn in faith to God. Having faith is the beginning of spiritual change. Therefore, this blessing may refer to those who acknowledge that they're "**poor in spirit**" but then turn in faith to God, and as a result, will be blessed and belong to the Kingdom of Heaven.

4 **Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**

Jesus mentioned this teaching immediately after saying "**Blessed are the poor in spirit.**" Therefore, Jesus may have been referring to the emotions of sadness that people feel after recognizing that they are "**poor in spirit.**" Jesus was therefore teaching that comfort will be provided to all those who acknowledge in sadness the fact that they are poor in spirit, and they will be blessed when they turn to God in their mourning.

5 **Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.**

Jesus taught that those who are gentle will "**inherit the earth.**" To be gentle in nature is to be humble and peaceful, which is the opposite of being forceful. In many ways, this world is manipulated and controlled by force, but Jesus taught that the future of the earth will be a blessed inheritance to people who are gentle. In the ancient Book of Psalms, we can find similar Verses to this particular teaching of Jesus. In Psalms, Chapter 37, Verse 11, it is written; "**But the humble shall inherit the land, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace**" and

in Verse 34 of the same Chapter, it is written **"Wait for the Lord, and keep His way, and He will exalt you to inherit the land."**

**6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.**

The term "righteousness" is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "acting in accord with divine or moral law, to be free from guilt or sin." Jesus used the terms **"hunger and thirst after righteousness"** as a comparison for people who sincerely desire, seek and search for righteousness in their lives. Jesus promised that those who do will be **"blessed"** for their actions, and as a result, they will find and **"be filled"** with righteousness.

**7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.**

It is written in many ancient Scriptures that God is merciful. Therefore, in order to live in harmony with God, people must also show mercy toward others. Jesus promised that those who show mercy toward others, will be blessed and they **"shall obtain mercy"** from God.

**8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**

Jesus was here specifically referring to the purity of a person's heart. It is one thing for a person to outwardly present themselves as being pure, while it is quite another to have an inwardly pure heart. In the next Chapter, we will reflect about God who "sees in secret" and knows the true nature of a person's heart. Jesus promised that those who keep their hearts pure will be blessed and one day **"see God."**

**9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.**

Jesus taught that people who make peace with others will be blessed and be **"called children of God."** Therefore, to be God's children, people must live peacefully with one another, and make peace their goal. Peace is God's will for humanity, and Jesus promised that those who strive to make peace with others will be called God's children.

**10 Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.**

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to people who have been persecuted for the cause of righteousness (meaning mistreated, criticized or disgraced). Even though God's will is for people to make peace with each other, we cannot control the actions of each other. Here Jesus revealed the dark side of human nature by exposing the fact that some people will persecute others for living righteously. This and the next teaching reveal that there will be opposition against people who strive for righteousness. However, Jesus promised that those who suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness, will be blessed and the Kingdom of Heaven will belong to them.

**11 Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

Just like those who are persecuted for their righteousness, in this final teaching, Jesus further revealed that there will be opposition against people who specifically believe in Jesus. He taught that people should rejoice and be happy for this, because they will be blessed for their belief in Him and will be greatly rewarded in Heaven for it. Although this persecution will be difficult, He said that God's prophets were also persecuted in the past to remind that those who are righteous have always faced persecution.

# The Sermon On The Mount

## Salt and Light

*The rest of Chapter 5 and the next two Chapters 6 and 7 of the Book of Matthew are the remainder of Jesus' sermon on the mount*

### **The Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses, 13-20**

**13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted? It is then good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill can't be hidden. 15 Neither do you light a lamp, and put it under a measuring basket, but on a stand; and it shines to all who are in the house. 16 Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**

**17 "Don't think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill. 18 For most certainly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter or one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished. 19 Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.**

### **Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses 13-20**

*The first two Verses in Chapter 5 were "Seeing the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He opened his mouth and taught them", Therefore, the teachings found in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 were for His disciples, and by extension, for all people who follow Jesus.*

1) Jesus continued His teachings, saying "**You are the salt of the earth.**" Like salt, Jesus' followers could enhance the lives of other people, by sharing their knowledge of Jesus' teachings with them. Jesus warned though "**if the salt has lost its' flavor, with what will it be salted?**"; meaning that, if Jesus' followers lose their faith in Him, how then will they be able to share His teachings with others and bring them to faith in God too.

2) In Chapter 4, it was reflected that when the prophet Isaiah wrote "**The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who lived in the land of the shadow of death, on them the light has shined**" he was predicting that the people of Capernaum, who were walking in spiritual darkness, would see a great light when Jesus taught them about the Kingdom of Heaven. In the same way, when Jesus said "**You are the light of the world**", He was revealing that they too were

receiving the knowledge of God from Him, and this "light" is meant to be shared with all people of the world. Jesus then used examples to show how light naturally shines out and should not be hidden, and in the same way, He said "**let your light shine before men**", meaning that they should not hide Jesus' teachings, but rather, openly share their faith and what they have learned with others. In doing this, Jesus said "**they may see your good works**", meaning that other people will witness them sharing, and as a result, may also come to accept and receive this knowledge too "**and glorify your Father who is in Heaven**", which refers to the fact that their actions will be glorifying God.

3) Jesus said that He did not come "**to destroy the law or the prophets.**" Here, Jesus was referring to the ancient Hebrew scriptures known as the TANAKH. There are three sections that make up the TANAKH, and they are: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. Each section is made up of a number of Books. I) The Books of "the Law" are commandments that God gave to Moses, to write down as instructions for how to live according to God's will. II) The Books of "the Prophets" are books that were written by people who were chosen by God to teach on His behalf, to live as role models of righteousness, and to deliver God's messages to His people. In addition, many prophets had visions which predicted events that would happen in the future.

Jesus said that He did not come to destroy these Books, but rather, He came "**to fulfill**", which meant that He came to be an example of how to live according to God's will, and that He was the One who the ancient prophets had predicted would come.

4) Jesus then said, "**For most certainly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter or one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the law until all things are accomplished.**" These words are difficult to reflect upon at this stage in the book. However, Jesus was predicting future events, when he said that nothing written in the Books of the Law would "**pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished.**" These words will be reflected upon in later Chapters, when it becomes clear what Jesus was referring to.

5) Jesus said that "**unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.**" This statement would have been very challenging and difficult for the people listening to understand, because they considered the Pharisees and scribes to be the most holy and righteous of all people. The majority of the crowd listening to Jesus speak would have been the general public, who looked up to the Pharisees and scribes, and believed that these men were far more righteous than themselves. In saying this, Jesus was actually pointing out that many of the Pharisees and scribes were really hypocrites, and although they outwardly appeared to be holy, they were not living righteously at all. In future Chapters, Jesus will reveal just how unholy they really were.



## **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus said "**unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.**" This statement reveals the significance of Jesus' teachings and how they would differ from the scribes and Pharisees. Therefore, by studying the teachings of Jesus we too can learn what it means to be righteous and prepare ourselves for acceptance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

# The Sermon On The Mount

## Commandments, Warnings and Advice

### Part I

#### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses 21-30

21 "You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, 'You shall not murder;' and 'Whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' 22 But I tell you that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause will be in danger of the judgment. Whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' will be in danger of the council. Whoever says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of Gehenna. 23 "If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are with him on the way; lest perhaps the prosecutor deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. 26 Most certainly I tell you, you shall by no means get out of there, until you have paid the last penny. 27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery;' 28 but I tell you that everyone who gazes at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna. 30 If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna.

#### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 5, Verse 21-30

1) Jesus said "**you have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, you shall not murder.**" Here Jesus was referring to one of ten commandments which God provided to Moses, which are found in the ancient Book of Exodus, Chapter 20, Verses 3-17. These commandments were laws given for people to follow, in order to live according to God's will.

2) Jesus continued saying "**Whoever murders will be in danger of the judgement.**" There are many writings in the ancient Books of Scripture written about "**the judgement.**" Verses 13-14, from Chapter 12 in the ancient Book of Ecclesiastes, specifically refer to judgement and the importance of keeping God's commandments, and they are written as follows, "**Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgement, with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.**" Jesus taught in great detail about "**the judgement**", and we will reflect more about those teachings in later Chapters.

3) Jesus then expanded upon the commandment against murder, to reveal that God will also judge people for being angry with others, without having just cause, or even for showing aggressive disrespect towards other people. Although we may not have considered these actions to be worthy of God's judgement, this teaching of Jesus aligns with those Verses from Ecclesiastes, where it is written **"God will bring every work into judgement, with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil."**

4) Jesus continued to say that people should not present their offerings and prayers to God until they've settled their differences and reconciled themselves with anyone who has anything against them. Therefore, rather than holding internal hostility against one another, God's will is for people to work together towards making peace with each other.

5) Regarding adultery, Jesus taught that lustful thoughts and desires are considered to be as sinful as the actual act of adultery itself. Jesus revealed that these thoughts and desires become sins because they're committed within a person's heart.

6) In Verses 29 and 30 Jesus used the extreme examples of plucking out an eye, or cutting off a hand, if those bodily members cause a person **"to stumble."** To "stumble" is a term that Jesus will use throughout this book, and in every case, it is used in reference to turning away from or losing faith in God or in Jesus. In this case Jesus was referring to the sin of lust. As a result, Jesus said: **"For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna."** Jesus also referred to **"the fire of Gehenna"** in Verse 22.

***Special note:***

In order to understand "Gehenna", it may be helpful to look at some ancient Scriptures for interpretation. The word "Gehenna" represents a Hebrew word that literally translates as "the Valley of Hinnom", and we can find writings about this place in two ancient Books.

In the ancient Book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, Chapter 23, Verse 3, it is written that King Josiah, who was the ruling King of Judah at that time, made a covenant before God **"to keep His commandments, His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart, and all his soul"** and **"all the people agreed to the covenant."** He then took action to eliminate anything that pertained to worship and sacrifice to other gods.

Later in Verse 10, the "Valley of Hinnom" is specifically mentioned, where it's written that King Josiah **"defiled Topeth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or daughter to pass through the fire to Molech."** Molech was a pagan God, and people were worshiping him by burning children as a sacrifice to him. According to this Verse, the "Valley of Hinnom" was a place where these horrifying rituals were happening.

In the ancient Book of Jeremiah, Chapter 7, Verses 23-24, the prophet Jeremiah wrote that God spoke to him about His people, saying, **"Listen to my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the way that I**

**command you, that it may be well with you. But they didn't listen or turn their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their own evil heart, and went backward, and not forward."** Then in Verse 31, God spoke to Jeremiah specifically about the "Valley of Hinnom", saying **"They have built the high places of Topeth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I didn't command, nor did it come into my mind."** As a result, God told Jeremiah **"Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: "Behold, my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, on man, on animal, on the trees of the field, and on the fruit of the ground; and it will burn and will not be quenched."**

Therefore, if we compare these passages from these two separate Books, we can see the focus is on keeping God's commandments, and that "Gehenna" was a place of judgement. In the Book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, King Josiah made a covenant before God to follow His commandments and then took action against Gehenna. In the Book of Jeremiah, we see God judging and pouring out His wrath on Gehenna, because the sinful people had turned away from His commandments. Therefore, by using "Gehenna" in His teachings, Jesus was pointing directly toward those ancient Scriptures to both support and emphasize the importance of following God's commandments, while providing a powerful warning of God's judgment upon those who do not.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) These teachings of Jesus reveal that sin runs deeper than actually committing sinful acts. Sin also includes the thoughts and desires of our hearts. Therefore, where God's judgement is concerned, these inner thoughts and desires committed within our hearts can be as damaging as committing those physical acts.

## Part II

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses 31-48

31 "It was also said, 'Whoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorce,' 32 but I tell you that whoever puts away his wife, except for the cause of sexual immorality, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries her when she is put away commits adultery. 33 "Again you have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall perform to the Lord your vows,' 34 but I tell you, don't swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God; 35 nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Neither shall you swear by your head, for you can't make one hair white or black. 37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' be 'No.' Whatever is more than these is of the evil one. 38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I tell you, don't resist him who is evil; but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 If anyone sues you to take away your coat, let him have your cloak also. 41 Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks you, and don't turn away him who desires to borrow from you.

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 47 If you only greet your friends, what more do you do than others? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 5, Verse 31-48

1) Jesus taught that marriage should not be dissolved, except when adultery has been committed. This reveals the importance and obligation that people are under to remain committed to their marriages. It also reveals that adultery is the complete opposite of what a marriage commitment represents, and therefore becomes the just cause for divorce.

2) The next instructions relate to making promises. Jesus said that you have heard **"it was said to them of old time, You shall not make false vows, but shall perform to the Lord your vows."** This is a reference to ancient Scripture regarding making promises to God. In the Book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 23, Verse 21, **"When you vow a vow to Yahweh your God, you shall not be slack to pay it; for Yahweh your God will surely require it of you; and it would be sin in you."** Jesus then said **"but I tell you, don't swear at all"** thus revealing that people must not make promises at all. Further to that point, He said that people **"can't make one hair white or black"**, meaning that we are not in control of the future, and a

promise is a commitment made for the future. Jesus continued to say that people must simply be true to their word, by letting their " **'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' be 'No'. Whatever is more than these is of the evil one.**"

In addition to the passage in Deuteronomy, there is another reference in the ancient Book of Ecclesiastes, Chapter 5, Verses, 4-6: "**When you vow a vow to God, don't defer to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay that which you vow. It is better that you should not vow, than that you should vow and not pay. Don't allow your mouth to lead you into sin.**" This particular passage speaks directly to Jesus' counsel, in that, it is better not to promise at all than to promise and not pay. The portion of this Verse "**Don't allow your mouth to lead you into sin**" compares with Jesus' comment "**Whatever is more than these is of the evil one.**" Jesus was revealing that people should speak truthfully, and a spoken promise that is not kept is considered to be sinful. It is easy to promise something without knowing whether or not it can be fulfilled, or worse, without having the intention of fulfilling it.

3) The last section of this Chapter is about charity and loving our enemies as well as loving our friends. On these points, Jesus taught I) Avoid revenge and retaliation, as it is better to suffer injury for the sake of peace than to exchange evil for evil. II) Give to anyone who asks and give them more than they ask for. III) Love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us and pray for those who mistreat us. Jesus taught to do these things so "**that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven**", which means to be children of God. God provides for all people, even wicked and ungrateful people. Jesus expanded on these teachings by making it clear that everyone shows love to the people they love, and he included the "**tax collectors**", who were people rejected by the Israelite society, as also loving the same way. Jesus' message was not to withhold love from anyone, but to extend love to everyone.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) These teachings are the basics of true love and charity. Jesus taught that there is no reward in only showing love and compassion to those who love us. Remembering that God shares His love and mercy with sinful people in the same way that He does with righteous people. Therefore, practicing these teachings imitates and glorifies God.

# The Sermon On the Mount

## Charity, Mercy and Prayer

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 6, Verse 1-18

1 "Be careful that you don't do your charitable giving before men, to be seen by them, or else you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

2 Therefore when you do merciful deeds, don't sound a trumpet before yourself, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may get glory from men. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you do merciful deeds, don't let your left hand know what your right hand does, 4 so that your merciful deeds may be in secret, then your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

5 "When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Most certainly, I tell you, they have received their reward. 6 But you, when you pray, enter into your inner room, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7 In praying, don't use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their much speaking. 8 Therefore don't be like them, for your Father knows what things you need, before you ask him. 9 Pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. 10 Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. 13 Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.'

14 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. 16 "Moreover when you fast, don't be like the hypocrites, with sad faces. For they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen by men to be fasting. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face; 18 so that you are not seen by men to be fasting, but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 6, Verse 1-18

*The first 2 Verses in Chapter 5 were "Seeing the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He opened his mouth and taught them", Therefore, the teachings found in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 were for His disciples, and by extension, for all people who follow Jesus.*

1) Jesus taught that people should not be charitable or show mercy for appearance, so that others will see their actions, and glorify them for their good works. If they do that, God will not reward them for their efforts, because their reward will be the glory they receive from people. This type of charity and mercy is prideful and hypocritical, which is against the true nature of these acts. Jesus taught that charity and mercy must be sincere, humble and done privately.

2) For the same reason, Jesus taught that prayer must also be done privately. He also revealed that God knows the things people need, even before they ask Him; therefore, it is of no benefit to perform lengthy prayers that repeat requests to Him. Jesus taught how to pray by giving an example in Verses 9-13 of this Chapter. This prayer is commonly known as "The Lord's Prayer."

3) Jesus specifically said that people must forgive anyone who has trespassed against them, before they ask God to forgive their own trespasses. Therefore, forgiving others is required in order to receive God's forgiveness.

4) Next, Jesus taught how to fast. It follows the same approach as charity and prayer, in that fasting is also a private matter between the person fasting and God. In the same way, fasting should not be displayed openly in order to receive recognition from others. The act of fasting is to deny ourselves food for a specific period of time. Fasting means experiencing self-discipline and self-denial. Since hunger is one of our basic human experiences, fasting requires denying ourselves one of our inner desires. When people turn away from the distraction of food, in the form of fasting, and instead focus their hearts on seeking God, they are then honoring God in secret, for which Jesus promised they will be rewarded.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus said this about God when He was teaching about charity, mercy, prayer and fasting "**your father who sees in secret will reward you openly.**" We are always in the presence of God, and therefore, God sees our acts of charity, mercy, prayer, and fasting and He knows what lies within our hearts. Jesus' teachings reveal that the true reward for these acts doesn't come from other people, but rather comes from God, and He will openly reward us when we perform these acts privately.

2) Since the Lord's Prayer was taught by Jesus Himself, and He said "**Pray like this**", this prayer can therefore be a personal prayer for each of us. It is important to understand the depth of this prayer in its simplicity, and how this prayer relates to us individually, and can be used to connect with God. Through this example Jesus taught that prayers do not need to be complicated and lengthy. Prayer is a way for us to communicate with God and help us to enrich our faith in Him; and praying this prayer can help us to do that.

In reviewing the Lord's prayer Verse by Verse, the following considerations are revealed:



I) **'Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy**

This acknowledges having a father who is in the Heavenly realm, in whom we honor, and even consider His name to be Holy.

II) **Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**

This invites God's Kingdom into our lives, so that we can do His will on earth, in the same way that His will is done in Heaven.

III) **Give us today our daily bread**

This requests God to provide us with our daily needs.

IV) **Forgive us our debts,**

This asks for God's forgiveness for the sins and offences that we have committed against Him and others.

V) **as we also forgive our debtors**

This acknowledges that God requires us to also forgive those who have committed sins and offences against us

VI) **Bring us not into temptation,**

This requests God's help against being led into the temptations of this world

VII) **But deliver us from the evil one.**

This requests God's protection against evil forces

VIII) **For yours is the Kingdom,**

This acknowledges God's Kingdom as the one true Kingdom

XI) **the power,**

This acknowledges God's power is above all others

X) **and the glory forever.**

This acknowledges that God alone is worthy of all glory and honor forever

XI) **Amen.'**

This word reflects our belief that these Verses are truth

3) Jesus taught that fasting should be a personal experience between God and ourselves and done in private. In both Verses 16 and 17, Jesus said "**when you fast**", which reveals that fasting is an important part of honoring God and our relationship with Him.

# The Sermon On The Mount

## Warnings and Advice

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 6, Verse 19-34

19 "Don't lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don't break through and steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't serve both God and Mammon. 25 Therefore I tell you, don't be anxious for your life: what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor yet for your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 See the birds of the sky, that they don't sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you of much more value than they?

27 "Which of you, by being anxious, can add one moment to his lifespan? 28 Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They don't toil, neither do they spin, 29 yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today exists, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, won't he much more clothe you, you of little faith?

31 "Therefore don't be anxious, saying, 'What will we eat?', 'What will we drink?' or, 'With what will we be clothed?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore don't be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day's own evil is sufficient.

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 6, Verse 19-34

1) Jesus taught that the treasures of this world are temporary and that we should not focus our energies on acquiring them. Instead, people should seek after the true riches of Heavenly treasure. Worldly goods can easily be lost in many different ways, but Heavenly treasures can never be taken away. Jesus said, "**for where your**

**treasure is, there your heart will be also**", meaning that whatever we seek after becomes that which we hold dearest to ourselves.

2) Jesus explained that "**No one can serve two masters**", which expanded upon His teaching "**for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**" Jesus continued "**You can't serve both God and Mammon.**" The word "**mammon**" refers to wealth and by extension the pursuit of it. Therefore, Jesus was teaching that people cannot set their hearts on both seeking God and seeking after worldly treasures at the same time.

3) Jesus said, "**Therefore I tell you, don't be anxious for your life: what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor yet for your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothing? See the birds of the sky, that they don't sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you of much more value than they?**" In saying this, Jesus was teaching not to be concerned about the necessities of life, urging His disciples to trust in God's care. Jesus pointed to the fact that God provides for the necessities of all creatures on earth. He revealed that God provides for the needs of people too, who are much more precious to Him than other creatures. Jesus expanded on this teaching by saying "**seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness**", and He promised that if they do, "**all these things will be given to you as well.**"

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus taught "**You can't serve both God and Mammon.**" By setting our hearts on seeking after worldly possessions, we become blinded toward the treasures of Heaven. Jesus was teaching that we can make a choice to either serve God or devote ourselves to earthly treasures, because we can't do both.

2) Jesus taught "**The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness.**" In previous reflections, light and darkness have been used to describe the knowledge of God, and that Jesus' teachings about God and Heaven brought spiritual light into the world. This new teaching extends upon those previous teachings, in that having the knowledge of God fills a person with spiritual light, and those who do not have this knowledge live in spiritual darkness.

3) When Jesus said "**Therefore don't be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself**", He was teaching us not to not worry about our future needs, or the events of tomorrow, because each day will present new and different challenges that can cause worry. He continued saying "**Each day's own evil is sufficient**", which means that although Jesus has taught us not to worry and to place our trust in God care, there will be many distractions that will try to draw us away from trusting in God. Therefore, it is enough that we confront our daily temptations

and maintain our faith in God, without worrying about what we might face in the future.

4) From these teachings we can take comfort in knowing that we have a loving Father in Heaven who provides for His children's needs on earth, while we seek after His Kingdom and righteousness; and that we will also one day be rewarded with the treasures that He has waiting for us in Heaven.

# **The Sermon On the Mount**

## **Judgment, Discipline and Reward**

### **The Book of Matthew, Chapter 7**

**1 Don't judge, so that you won't be judged. 2 For with whatever judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but don't consider the beam that is in your own eye? 4 Or how will you tell your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye;' and behold, the beam is in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye. 6 Don't give that which is holy to the dogs, neither throw your pearls before the pigs, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. 7 Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. To him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or who is there among you, who, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, who will give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! 12 Therefore whatever you desire for men to do to you, you shall also do to them; for this is the law and the prophets. 13 Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. 14 How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it. 15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. 16 By their fruits you will know them. Do you gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree produces good fruit; but the corrupt tree produces evil fruit. 18 A good tree can't produce evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that doesn't grow good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them. 21 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' 23 Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.' 24 Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on a rock. 25 The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it didn't fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 Everyone who hears these words of mine, and doesn't do them will be like a foolish man, who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it fell and great was its fall.**

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching, 29 for he taught them with authority, and not like the scribes

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 7

*The first two Verses in Chapter 5 were "Seeing the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He opened his mouth and taught them", Therefore, the teachings found in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 were for His disciples, and by extension, for all people who follow Jesus.*

1) Jesus taught not to judge or criticize other people, warning that all will be judged in the same way that they judge others. This is another reference to "the judgement" time, which Jesus will teach more about in later Chapters. Jesus used the example of a speck and beam to illustrate how people can be hypocritical, pointing out the flaws in others, while they themselves may have greater flaws of their own. Jesus taught to admit and try to fix our own faults first before criticizing or offering to help others with theirs.

2) Jesus taught, "**Don't give that which is holy to the dogs, neither throw your pearls before the pigs, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.**" The "**dogs**" refer to people who reject Jesus' teachings, God's Word and do not live according to God's will. "**That which is holy**" refers to Jesus' teachings and God's Word from ancient scripture. "**Your pearls**" refers to the knowledge and understanding of Jesus' teachings and God's Word. Therefore, by this parable Jesus meant that, His disciples should stop sharing their knowledge when they encounter people who reject Jesus' teachings and God's Word. Because, in doing so, they would not further expose Holy teachings to rejection and hatred, and they'd avoid having that rejection and hatred turned against them too.

3) Jesus said "**Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened for you.**" Jesus spoke these words immediately after His parable about the knowledge of God; therefore, this teaching continues to address the knowledge of God. Jesus promised, I) When people ask for the knowledge of God, through prayer, it will be given to them. II) When they seek the knowledge of God, through His Word, they will find it. III) And when they knock, by inviting God into their lives, a relationship with Him will begin. Jesus then compared this generosity of God with earthly parents, who never deny the desires of their children. In the same way, God will reveal Himself and come into the lives of all who seek Him.

4) Jesus said "**whatever you desire for men to do to you, you shall also do to them.**" This plain and clear sentence reflects the love, mercy and forgiveness that God constantly offers to everyone. However, the next sentence "**for this is the law and the prophets**", is the key to this teaching. In Chapter 5, we reflected that "the Law" and "the Prophets" were the instructional and prophetic Books found in the Hebrew TANAKH. Jesus was here revealing that this is a fundamental message to be learned and practiced from those Books, and the core of His own teachings.

5) Jesus taught to **“Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it.”** This teaching reveals I) There are two different life paths to follow; one is confining and limited, and the other is open and unlimited. II) Many people follow the wide path, while few find and follow the narrow path. III) Jesus taught that the wide path leads to "destruction" and the narrow path leads to "life." Further on in this Chapter Jesus revealed that He was teaching about entering into the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, the wide path that leads to "destruction", leads away from the Kingdom of Heaven, and the narrow path that leads to "life", leads toward it.

6) Jesus warned **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves.”** These are people who disguise themselves as being prophets but they're actually not. Their "sheep's clothing" is the outward appearance of innocence and good intention, while their true nature is like "ravening wolves", intent on destruction. The rule He gives to recognize them is **“by their fruits you will know them”**, meaning that their actions and behaviors will reveal their true nature.

7) Jesus said, **“Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord', will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven but he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven.”** Meaning that it is not acceptable just to acknowledge who Jesus is, in order to enter into Heaven, but rather, Heaven is for those who act upon and do the will of God.

8) Next, Jesus revealed that many who prophesy and do mighty works in His name will not be accepted into Heaven, because they are those **“who work iniquity.”** These words expand upon the teaching of ravening wolves disguised in sheep's clothing, where a person may be disguising themselves as prophesying or doing great works in Jesus name, but instead their actions are really based on wicked intentions. Jesus revealed that these people would be rejected from the Kingdom of Heaven.

9) Jesus compared those **“who hears these words of mine and does them”** with wise men who build their houses upon a rock; and those **“who hears these words of mine, and doesn't do them”** He compared to foolish men who build their houses upon sand, that eventually fall. With these comparisons, Jesus was revealing that it is careless to hear His teachings and not follow them.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus said **“whatever you desire for men to do to you, you shall also do to them.”** This teaching is an application for our daily lives to strive toward when interacting with other people.

2) Jesus revealed that the narrow path that leads to life is a path that few people find or follow. We will reflect more about how we can find and follow this path in later Chapters. Jesus also taught to avoid following the wide path, even though it is the one that is most commonly taken.

3) Jesus taught that we can determine false prophets by their "**fruits**." One such "fruit" would be whether or not their actions and behaviors align with Jesus' teachings, and God's Word found in ancient Scripture.

4) Jesus revealed that the parable of a house built on rock versus a house built on sand compares with people who follow His teachings versus those who do not. A house built on a foundation of rock can weather the storms that beat against it, whereas one built on sand cannot and will eventually be destroyed. In the same way, by following Jesus' teachings we can be strengthened to overcome challenges and temptations and secure our future in Heaven. On the other hand, Jesus warned that ignoring His teachings would lead to future destruction and being unable to weather through the challenges and temptations that we may face. We will reflect further on this "future destruction" in later Chapters

5) For followers of Jesus, it is important to study and apply these teachings from Chapters 5, 6 and 7 in our lives, so that one day we too can enjoy the treasures that are promised in Heaven.



# Miracles and Faith

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 8, Verses 1-17

1 When he came down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. 2 Behold, a leper came to him and worshiped him, saying, "Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean."

3 Jesus stretched out his hand, and touched him, saying, "**I want to. Be made clean.**" Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 4 Jesus said to him, "**See that you tell nobody, but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.**" 5 When he came into Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking him, 6 and saying, "Lord, my servant lies in the house paralyzed, grievously tormented." 7 Jesus said to him, "**I will come and heal him.**" 8 The centurion answered, "Lord, I'm not worthy for you to come under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I am also a man under authority, having under myself soldiers. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and tell another, 'Come,' and he comes; and tell my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

10 When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to those who followed, "**Most certainly I tell you, I haven't found so great a faith, not even in Israel. 11 I tell you that many will come from the east and the west, and will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, 12 but the children of the Kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**" 13 Jesus said to the centurion, "**Go your way. Let it be done for you as you have believed.**" His servant was healed in that hour. 14 When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. 15 He touched her hand, and the fever left her. She got up and served him. 16 When evening came, they brought to him many possessed with demons. He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick; 17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, "He took our infirmities, and bore our diseases."

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 8, Verses 1-17

1) The leper worshipped Jesus, and said to Him confidently "Lord if you want to, you can make me clean." Jesus' response was simply "**I want to. Be made clean.**" After Jesus cured him, He said "**See that you tell nobody, but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.**" These words reveal a few things: I) Jesus revealed that He did not want to take any credit for healing the man. II) Instead, Jesus wanted the man to go to a priest and offer "**the gift that Moses commanded**", which meant that Jesus wanted the glory and honor to be given to God for his healing. III) Through these instructions, Jesus was showing His support for the commandments that God gave to Moses; and He wanted the cured man to honor those commandments, as a testimony to God's laws. The "**gift that Moses commanded**" can be found in the ancient Book of Leviticus, Chapter 14, where details of "**the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing**" are written. This law explains the procedures that a priest must take, and the actions

that a person must make, in order to be presented before God and receive cleansing from their leprosy.

2) The centurion, who asked Jesus to heal his servant, had such deep faith in Jesus that he was convinced it wasn't even necessary for Jesus to come to his servant in order to heal him. He believed that Jesus only needed to **"say the word"** and his servant would be healed. It is also written that he did not feel worthy of receiving Jesus into his house, which showed his great humility as well. Jesus said **"I haven't found so great a faith, not even in Israel"**, meaning that up to that point, Jesus had not found a single person, including from the people of Israel, who had as much faith in Jesus as did the Roman centurion.

3) The ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 107 is about people who turn to God for help when they're in times of distress, and how God's loving kindness shows them mercy whenever they turn to Him. Verses 19-20 of Psalms 107 is written as follows: **"Then they cry to Yahweh in their trouble, he saves them out of their distresses. He sends his word and heals them, and delivers them from their graves."** The centurion believed that Jesus could heal his servant by simply sending His word, and it would be done, and Jesus responded to the centurion's faith by doing exactly that. Therefore, by Jesus healing the centurion's servant through sending His word, we find: I) The ancient scripture written in Psalm 107 was another prophecy which Jesus fulfilled. II) This ancient scripture revealed that Jesus' ability to heal by sending His word was accomplished through the power of God, as "Yahweh" is a Hebrew word for God.

3) Jesus then said that **"many will come from the east and from the west, and will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven."** Here Jesus was predicting that many people from every part of the world would be admitted into the Kingdom of Heaven and be joined together with the original forefathers of the people of Israel. However, He then said **"but the children of the Kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** Jesus was here predicting that many people who consider themselves to be God's children, would in fact be rejected from God's Kingdom, and **"thrown out into the outer darkness."** Jesus will expand upon these predictions in later Chapters.

4) Jesus said to the centurion **"Let it be done for you as you have believed"**, meaning that it was because of the centurion's faith and belief that his servant was healed. Saying these words to the centurion would have also benefited the others surrounding Jesus, because they too would have witnessed the faith and belief of the centurion and heard Jesus explain that his servant would be healed because of his faith and belief. Jesus will give more attention to the power of faith and belief in later Chapters.

5) Jesus continued to heal a multitude of sick and possessed people through His touch and His Word. Matthew wrote that by healing others, Jesus fulfilled another

ancient prophecy written about Him by the prophet Isaiah. Here Matthew was referring to the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 53, Verse 4, where Isaiah wrote: **"Surely He has borne our sickness, and carried our suffering."** This Verse does indeed predict Jesus would cure many who were sick and suffering. However, if we also include Verse 3 from this same Chapter of the Book of Isaiah, a more complete prophecy about Jesus is provided. Verses 3 and 4 combined together are written as follows: **"He was despised, and rejected by men; a man of suffering, and acquainted with disease. He was despised as one from whom men hid their face; and we didn't respect him. Surely He has borne our sickness, and carried our suffering."** Yes, Isaiah predicted that Jesus would heal the sick and suffering, but he also predicted that Jesus Himself would be rejected by men and suffer too. We will read in later Chapters how Jesus would be rejected by many, and that He would suffer greatly too.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

- 1) It is written that the leper worshipped Jesus and had faith that He could cleanse him of his disease, if Jesus wanted to. Jesus responded to the leper's comment by simply saying **"I want to."** This reveals that when we worship Jesus and confidently put our faith in Him, He wants to help us.
- 2) The centurion's faith and belief provide a wonderful example that can be learned from, because Jesus said, **"Let it be done for you as you have believed"** and, as a result of his belief, it is written that **"His servant was healed in that hour."**
- 3) Jesus' comment **"many will come from the east and from the west, and will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven"** is good news for all people around the world, in that, through faith and belief in Jesus we can all be accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven. However, in saying **"but the children of the Kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"**, Jesus also warned of the hopeless and desperate situation awaiting those who do not have faith in Him.

# Following and Faith

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 8, Verses 18-34

18 Now when Jesus saw great multitudes around him, he gave the order to depart to the other side. 19 A scribe came, and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." 20 Jesus said to him, "**The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.**" 21 Another of his disciples said to him, "Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father." 22 But Jesus said to him, "**Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.**"

23 When he got into a boat, his disciples followed him. 24 Behold, a violent storm came up on the sea, so much that the boat was covered with the waves, but he was asleep. 25 They came to him, and woke him up, saying, "Save us, Lord! We are dying!"

26 He said to them, "**Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?**" Then he got up, rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm. 27 The men marveled, saying, "What kind of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

28 When he came to the other side, into the country of the Gergesenes, two people possessed by demons met him there, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that nobody could pass that way. 29 Behold, they cried out, saying, "What do we have to do with you, Jesus, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" 30 Now there was a herd of many pigs feeding far away from them. 31 The demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of pigs."

32 He said to them, "**Go!**" They came out, and went into the herd of pigs: and behold, the whole herd of pigs rushed down the cliff into the sea, and died in the water. 33 Those who fed them fled, and went away into the city, and told everything, including what happened to those who were possessed with demons. 34 Behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus. When they saw him, they begged that he would depart from their borders.

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 8, Verses 18-34

1) When the scribe said to Jesus "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go", Jesus responded by saying "**The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.**" His response contained two very important observations: I) The first was that the scribe should not expect any worldly advantages if he chose to follow Jesus. II) Secondly, this is the first time that Jesus refers to Himself as "**the Son of Man.**"

There are four ancient Books, known as "the Gospels", and they are specifically about the life and teachings of Jesus. They include this Book of Matthew, as well as the Books of Mark, Luke and John. Within these four Books, Jesus referred to Himself as "**the Son of Man**" more than 80 times combined. In fact, it is the name that He used most often when referring to Himself.

In the ancient Book of Daniel, the title "Son of Man" is specifically mentioned as well. In this ancient Book, the prophet Daniel wrote about a vision that he had about a time of judgement, in which He saw the coming of the "Son of Man." This is what Daniel wrote in Chapter 7, Verses 13-14: **"I saw in the night visions, and behold, there came with the clouds of the sky one like a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. Dominion was given him, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which will not pass away, and his kingdom that which will not be destroyed."** We will reflect more about the significance of this prophecy and how it applies to Jesus in later Chapters.

2) When one of Jesus' disciples requested permission to bury His father, before following Jesus, He replied **"Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."** In the previous Chapter, Jesus taught that following His teachings would lead to life. In saying this, Jesus was referring to leaving the burial of this man to other people who were not interested in following Jesus, and seeking after His path to life; consequently, Jesus referred to those people as already being dead.

3) In the midst of a violent storm, the disciples experienced great fear, thinking that they were about to die. They woke Jesus from His sleep, saying **"Save us, Lord! We are dying!"** Jesus' response to them was to simply point out their lack of faith, saying **"Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?"**

4) In response to the disciples' fear, it is written that Jesus **"rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm."** As a result, the disciples marveled, saying **"What kind of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him."** Again, the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 107, is about people who turn to God for help when they're in times of distress and need, and how God's loving kindness shows them mercy whenever they turn to Him. Verses 23-30 of Psalms 107 is about men on a stormy sea who fear for their lives and turn to God for their safety. In Verses 28-30 it is written: **"Then they cry to Yahweh in their trouble, and he brings them out of their distress. He makes the storm a calm, so that its waves are still. Then they are glad because it is calm, so he brings them to their desired haven."** The history of Jesus calming the storm therefore reveals the following: I) This scripture written in Psalms 107 was another prophecy that was fulfilled by Jesus. II) Jesus calmed the storm through the power of God, as revealed in Psalms 107 that it is God who calmed the storm. III) Jesus performed this great miracle for the benefit of His disciples, to help strengthen their faith in Him.

5) Upon arriving into the country of the Gergesenes, Jesus was met with two people possessed by demons and they cried out to him, saying, **"What do we have to do with you, Jesus, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"** These two questions revealed: I) The demons identified and referred to Jesus as being the **"Son of God."** II) They wanted to know whether or not He was going to **"torment"** them **"before the time"**, which reveals they acknowledged that

He had power over them. We will reflect about "**the time**" that these demons were referring to in later Chapters.

6) The details of Jesus healing the two possessed people confirmed that He has power over demons. The fact that Jesus allowed the demons to enter into the pigs also reveals that the demons could not act without Jesus giving them permission. And finally, the herd of pigs running down the cliff and into the sea also reveals that Jesus drove the demons to their death, because it goes against the laws of nature for animals to voluntarily drown themselves.

7) The two final verses of this Chapter are: "**Behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus. When they saw him, they begged that he would depart from their borders.**" This appears to be a strange reaction from the people toward Jesus who had just performed amazing miracles before them. However, the history of this reaction is also recorded in the Book of Mark, and the Book of Luke, and in each of those two books, it is written that the people asked Jesus to leave because they were afraid of Him. It is also written that one of the healed men asked Jesus if he could go with Him when He departed, but Jesus told that man to stay, return to his house and declare the great things that God had done for him. In both Mark and Luke this man is recorded to have went out and proclaimed to the whole city the great things that God had done for him.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The answer Jesus gave to the scribe who wanted to follow Him, teaches that those who choose to follow Jesus should not be concerned with worldly comforts. In Chapter 6, Jesus taught that God will provide for those who seek His Kingdom and righteousness. Therefore, although we are not be concerned with worldly comforts, we can take comfort in knowing that God provides for those who have faith and follow Jesus.

2) Jesus' comment to one of His disciples to "**Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead**" is a teaching for all of His followers. Jesus previously taught that not everyone is willing to follow the "narrow path" that leads to life. However, for those who are willing, we must focus on this narrow path rather than being concerned with the paths of others. Following the narrow path requires a willingness to put aside worldly concerns whenever they prevent us or divert us away from following Jesus' teachings.

3) The miracle of Jesus' calming the storm was meant to teach His disciples to rely on their faith. Keeping this great miracle in mind can help strengthen our faith as well, because we also have Jesus as our great protector whenever we're faced with great dangers too.



# Forgiveness and Mercy

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 9, Verses 1-17

1 He entered into a boat, and crossed over, and came into his own city. 2 Behold, they brought to him a man who was paralyzed, lying on a bed. Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, **"Son, cheer up! Your sins are forgiven you."** 3 Behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man blasphemes." 4 Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, **"Why do you think evil in your hearts? 5 For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven;' or to say, 'Get up, and walk?'"** 6 **But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"** (then he said to the paralytic), **"Get up, and take up your mat, and go to your house."** 7 He arose and departed to his house. 8 But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such authority to men. 9 As Jesus passed by from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax collection office. He said to him, **"Follow me."** He got up and followed him. 10 As he sat in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 When Jesus heard it, he said to them, **"Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do. 13 But you go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'"** 14 Then John's disciples came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples don't fast?" 15 Jesus said to them, **"Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. 16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch would tear away from the garment, and a worse hole is made. 17 Neither do people put new wine into old wine skins, or else the skins would burst, and the wine be spilled, and the skins ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wine skins, and both are preserved."**

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 9, Verses 1-17

1) Jesus recognized the faith of the paralyzed man and of those who brought him to Jesus, and because of their faith, Jesus healed him. Jesus will teach more about faith in later Chapters

2) Jesus said **"the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"**, to which some of the scribes said to themselves **"This man blasphemes."** To "blaspheme" means to insult or show disrespect to God. The Israelite people believed that sins could only be forgiven by God, and in saying that He **"has authority on earth to forgive sins"**, Jesus was claiming that God gave Him authority to forgive sins on earth. In response, the scribes accused Jesus of speaking blasphemously or disrespectfully to God. Jesus then told the paralyzed man to get up and walk, and

after the man got up, it is written that "**when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.**" It is not written how the multitudes knew that Jesus' authority had been given to Him by God. However, it is written that "**they marveled and glorified God**" for it. Therefore, although the scribes accused Jesus of being disrespectful to God, the opposite was true, because the multitudes, who had witnessed this event, glorified God for the man's healing and for giving Jesus His authority. We will reflect more about Jesus' authority to forgive sins in later Chapters.

3) When Jesus said to Matthew "**Follow me**", it is written that Matthew simply "**got up and followed him.**" The Book of Matthew was written by the same Matthew introduced in this passage. Matthew does not provide any further details about his decision to follow Jesus. However, this simple description of his actions provides a clear indication of how he made the decision, in that he immediately got up and followed Jesus without hesitation.

4) Jesus responded to the Pharisees, who found fault in Him eating with tax collectors and sinners, by saying "**Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do.**" Here Jesus was referring to the spiritual health of these people as being sick, and in the same way that a person who is physically ill needs a doctor, Jesus was curing them of their spiritual sickness. A few Verses later, Jesus said "**for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance**", meaning, that Jesus mission was not to reach people who were already living righteous lives. Rather, He came to save sinners by calling them to repent of their sins, change their lives and seek to know God

5) Jesus then called out the Pharisees, who presumed to be spiritually healthy, by saying "**But you go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice"**", meaning that they required spiritual healing too. Here Jesus was quoting words from a prophet named Hosea and telling them to learn what that prophet meant when He wrote "**I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.**" This particular Verse is found in the ancient Book of Hosea, Chapter 6, Verse 6, where the prophet wrote: "**For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.**" Notice that Jesus only quoted the first part of the Verse. However, the whole Verse reveals the larger message that Jesus wanted them to learn. In Jesus' time, and historically, the priests of Israel performed various sacrifices and provided "**burnt offerings**" to God, in order to obtain forgiveness for sin. In this Book of Hosea, God revealed the details of how His people had turned away from Him and forgotten His laws; and yet His will is for them to return to Him and receive His mercy.

Jesus was telling the Pharisees to go back to the words of this prophet and learn the deeper message; that God's desire is for people to show mercy toward each other and to seek knowledge of Him, more than He desires them to practice traditions of giving offerings to Him.



6) John's disciples questioned Jesus, saying "**Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples don't fast?**" If Jesus did not require His disciples to fast like John's disciples did, it wasn't because He was against fasting. In fact, Jesus taught how to fast in His sermon on the mount. Jesus did not answer their question clearly, instead, He responded with three parables as follows:

I) First, Jesus said "**Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.**" Here Jesus compared a

bridegroom and his friends, with Himself and His disciples, suggesting that His disciples would fast after Jesus was no longer with them. With this initial parable Jesus was comparing the limited time that He would have with His disciples, with the joy that is shared between friends before one leaves to be joined in marriage with another. This was a special time among His disciples as they were following Him and learning about God and the Kingdom of Heaven.

II) With the next two parables, Jesus was revealing that His disciples were not yet ready to fast at that time, because they would not be able to handle the discipline of fasting. The parables of repairing an old garment with a new piece of unshrunk cloth, or putting new wine into an old wine skin, pointed that out because, in both cases, the garment and the wine skin would be destroyed. Jesus used these parables to represent spiritual change. The old garment and the old wine skin represent living an unholy life, focused on the ways of this world. The new cloth and new wine represent living a new holy life, focused on God and the Kingdom of Heaven. By using these parables, Jesus was revealing that the disciples were still living their old lives and were not yet spiritually ready for the difficult discipline of fasting; and, if they were forced to fast at that time, they would have rejected a necessary discipline that honors God, which would later become part of their spiritual transformation.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus responded to the faith of the paralyzed man and his friends by healing Him, which revealed that it is through their faith and turning to Jesus that He responded to their requests.

2) Jesus has authority to forgive sins on earth, therefore by turning in faith to Him, and asking for forgiveness, we too can receive forgiveness. We will reflect more about the forgiveness of sins in later Chapters.

3) Matthew's reaction to Jesus, when He said "**follow me**", provides an example of a person who followed Jesus in faith. In the same way, when we feel called to follow Jesus, our response should be immediate and whole hearted too. Like Matthew, God's purpose for us may not be clear at the time when the call comes. However, if we've been called, then we've been chosen and given an opportunity to respond and demonstrate to God that we are willing to follow in faith.

4) By sitting and eating with sinners, Jesus revealed that the mercy of God is freely given to all who truly repent and seek to know Him. Jesus explained that He came

into the world to save sinners by calling them to repent of their sins, which includes changing their lifestyle and turning toward God for mercy. Therefore, in order to receive God's mercy, there must be a willingness to repent of our sins and faithfully ask for His Mercy.

5) Through the wine skin and garment parables, Jesus revealed that seeking the knowledge of God is a process of spiritual transformation. This transformation happens in stages, over time, while we grow in our faith and knowledge of Him. And, as our spiritual health strengthens, so will our ability to endure the disciplines that honor God and become part of our spiritual transformation.

# Faith and Miracles

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 9, Verses 18-38

18 While he told these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." 19 Jesus got up and followed him, as did his disciples. 20 Behold, a woman who had a discharge of blood for twelve years came behind him, and touched the fringe of his garment; 21 for she said within herself, "If I just touch his garment, I will be made well." 22 But Jesus, turning around and seeing her, said, "**Daughter, cheer up! Your faith has made you well.**" And the woman was made well from that hour.

23 When Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute players, and the crowd in noisy disorder, 24 he said to them, "**Make room, because the girl isn't dead, but sleeping.**" They were ridiculing him. 25 But when the crowd was put out, he entered in, took her by the hand, and the girl arose. 26 The report of this went out into all that land.

27 As Jesus passed by from there, two blind men followed him, calling out and saying, "Have mercy on us, son of David!" 28 When he had come into the house, the blind men came to him. Jesus said to them, "**Do you believe that I am able to do this?**" They told him, "Yes, Lord." 29 Then he touched their eyes, saying, "**According to your faith be it done to you.**" 30 Their eyes were opened. Jesus strictly commanded them, saying, "**See that no one knows about this.**" 31 But they went out and spread abroad his fame in all that land.

32 As they went out, behold, a mute man who was demon possessed was brought to him. 33 When the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke. The multitudes marveled, saying, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!" 34 But the Pharisees said, "By the prince of the demons, he casts out demons."

35 Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people. 36 But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were harassed and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "**The harvest indeed is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into his harvest.**"

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 9, Verses 18-38

1) Healing the woman who had been suffering from a continuous flow of menstrual blood for twelve years showed that Jesus could cure permanent diseases. However, Jesus said to her "**Your faith has made you well**", which also revealed that it was her faith that enabled this miraculous cure.

2) Another extreme example of faith was that of the ruler whose daughter had died. He believed that Jesus could even bring his dead daughter back to life by laying His

hands upon her. Jesus went to her and He **"took her by the hand, and the girl arose."** This revealed that through faith in Jesus, even death could be overcome.

3) As Jesus was passing by, two blind men followed and called out after Him saying; **"Have mercy on us, son of David."** In calling Him **"Son of David"** they made it clear to Jesus that they believed He was the prophesied Messiah, from the line of King David; and by saying, **"Have mercy on us"** they also revealed to Jesus that they had faith in His ability to grant their request. Jesus healed the men after He asked them **"Do you believe that I am able to do this?"** and their response was **"yes Lord."** He then touched their eyes and said, **"According to your faith be it done to you"**, and **"their eyes were opened."** Once again, it is because of their faith and belief in Jesus that they were healed. After their healing though, Jesus strictly commanded them to **"See that no one knows about this."** Just as Jesus told the man to **"tell nobody"** after He healed Him of leprosy in Chapter 8, again after healing these men, Jesus diverts the credit away from Himself for this miracle.

4) After Jesus cast the demon out of the possessed mute man, the Pharisees said, **"By the prince of the demons, He casts out demons."** Although Jesus does not comment on this particular accusation made by the Pharisees, we'll read that Jesus does respond to a similar accusation made against Him later in Chapter 12.

5) At the end of this Chapter we see the compassion Jesus felt for the multitudes of people before Him, because they were described as being **"harassed and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd."** About this circumstance, Jesus said to His disciples **"The harvest indeed is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into His harvest."** Jesus used the words **"the harvest"** to represent people who are willing to receive His teachings and need to be led by those who already have faith in Him; and by **"the laborers"**, Jesus meant people who already have faith, and could teach others about their faith. Jesus said that **"the laborers are few"** which also meant that many more people of faith were needed to share their faith with others.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The woman cured of her continuous menstrual flow had great faith and belief in the power of Jesus, because it is written that she **"said within herself, "If I just touch His garment, I will be made well."** Jesus reacted to her by saying **"Daughter, cheer up! Your faith has made you well."** This is another example of how Jesus heals those who have great faith in Him. Therefore, having complete faith and belief in Jesus is required in order to receive His help.

2) It is written about the multitudes of people who were coming to see and hear Jesus, that He was **"moved with compassion, because they were harassed and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd."** Many of these people may have never seen or heard Jesus before. These words express the great love that Jesus has for everyone. In the same way, many people today do not yet know, have faith, or belief

in Jesus; and their lives may be scattered like sheep without a shepherd too. We will reflect in later Chapters how Jesus becomes the shepherd in the lives of His followers.

2) Jesus asked His disciples to pray that "**the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into His harvest**", which meant to pray that God would inspire people of faith to share their faith with those who do not have faith. This request to His disciples also applies to us, in that, we too can pray for more people to share their faith with others, as well as share our own faith, so that more people can come to know and have faith in God as well.

# Twelve Disciples

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 10, Verses 1-11

1 He called to himself his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every sickness. 2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these. The first, Simon, who is called Peter; Andrew, his brother; James the son of Zebedee; John, his brother; 3 Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus; Lebbaeus, who was also called Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Canaanite; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

5 Jesus sent these twelve out, and commanded them, saying, **“Don’t go among the Gentiles, and don’t enter into any city of the Samaritans. 6 Rather, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 As you go, preach, saying, ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!’ 8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. Freely you received, so freely give. 9 Don’t take any gold, silver, or brass in your money belts. 10 Take no bag for your journey, neither two coats, nor shoes, nor staff: for the laborer is worthy of his food.**

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 10, Verses 1-11

1) The Chapter began with **"He called to Himself His twelve disciples."** The term **"called"** is important because, even today, many people come to faith in God through an instinctive sense that they have been called, and they are drawn toward God because of this calling. In the ancient Book of John, Chapter 10, Jesus said **"I am the good shepherd... I have other sheep, which are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice."** These words of Jesus support this instinctive sense of "calling" that many people feel, which draws them toward God.

2) Jesus sent His disciples out and commanded:

I) They must not **"go among the Gentiles, and don’t enter into any city of the Samaritans."** The term "Gentiles" means anyone who is not an Israelite. The Samaritans were not Israelite people. However, they lived in the area where Jesus was sending His disciples. In many cases, the Samaritans did not believe in one God but worshipped multiple pagan gods; whereas the Israelites believed in only one God and considered themselves to be the "children of God."

II) Jesus continued to say **"Rather, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."** These instructions directed the disciples to specifically preach to the Israelite people who had become **"lost sheep."** By this, Jesus was most likely referring to the Israelites who had become like the Samaritans in their beliefs, and by straying from their faith in one God had become misguided or lost their faith. We will reflect more about the **"lost sheep"** of Israel in later Chapters.

III) Next, Jesus told His disciples to preach that **"The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"** This message would have been something new for the Israelites. Although the Israelites did not necessarily believe that death was the end, they were primarily

focused on their lives on earth and their beliefs on the afterlife were not clear or specific. This was a new message, that they should refocus their attention on the Kingdom of Heaven, rather than focusing on their life on earth. The message that Jesus wanted His disciples to preach was that the Kingdom of Heaven **"is at hand"** meaning that Heaven was "attainable" or "accessible" to them. Therefore, the message was both, death was not the final end, and that a Heavenly Kingdom existed, and was within their reach.

3) Jesus gave His disciples **"authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every sickness."** Jesus commanded them to **"go, preach, saying, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons."** Therefore, they were preaching Jesus' teachings, and while doing so, healing people at the same time. In the previous Chapter, it was reflected that God had given Jesus authority to forgive sins on earth. In this Chapter, Jesus gave authority to His disciples to heal people, which means by extension, their authority would have originally come from God too. Through Jesus, God gave the disciples the authority to work these miracles and Jesus reminded them that **"Freely you received, so freely give."** In saying this, Jesus reminded them that just as they had freely received the gift to heal others, their gift of healing others should also be freely given.

5) Jesus also commanded His disciples not to take anything with them, in preparation for their journey, and said **"for the laborer is worthy of his food."** Again, Jesus used the term **"the laborer"** as a reference to His disciples, who had faith in God and were sharing Jesus' teachings. In saying this, Jesus was reminding His disciples that God would provide for their needs and that they should place their faith and trust in God's care.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) This is the first time that we learn the names of all twelve of Jesus' disciples. Since Jesus chose these men to be His disciples, we can also learn from their teachings and writings. There are several ancient Books of Scripture that were written by Jesus' disciples, and those writings are collected in a single Book called the New Testament.

2) Jesus sent out His disciples to share His teachings and heal people. Therefore, the gifts that they were freely giving included both spiritual healing and physical healing. In doing so, the disciples were demonstrating God's love and compassion, in the same way that Jesus did.

3) The disciples were commanded to rely on God's care while they were being God's "laborers." In the same way, we too can be confident in God's care while we grow in our faith and share Jesus' teachings with others.

# Instructions and Warnings

## Part I

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 10, Verses 11-23

11 "Into whatever city or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy; and stay there until you go on. 12 As you enter into the household, greet it. 13 If the household is worthy, let your peace come on it, but if it isn't worthy, let your peace return to you. 14 Whoever doesn't receive you, nor hear your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. 15 Most certainly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city. 16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep among wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. 17 But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to councils, and in their synagogues they will scourge you. 18 Yes, and you will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the nations. 19 But when they deliver you up, don't be anxious how or what you will say, for it will be given you in that hour what you will say. 20 For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. 21 "Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child. Children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. 22 You will be hated by all men for my name's sake, but he who endures to the end will be saved. 23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next, for most certainly I tell you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man has come."

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 10, Verses 11-23

1) Jesus revealed that His teachings would not be received by everyone, and that His disciples must seek out those who are worthy and will listen to them. Jesus told them that if they meet people who are unworthy, meaning those who won't hear or accept His teachings, they should leave them and move on to find others who are willing.

2) Jesus warned that those who reject His teachings would be punished "**in the day of judgement**", and He warned their fate would be worse than that of the ancient cities of Sodom & Gomorrah. Once again, Jesus referred to "**the day of judgement**", which He will continue to teach about in later Chapters. In ancient history, God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because they were filled with sinful people. The details of the history and destruction of these two cities can found in the ancient Book of Genesis, Chapter 19, Verse 24-25.

3) Jesus told His disciples that they would be like "**sheep among wolves**", in that they would find themselves in circumstances where they would be vulnerable and faced with aggression for sharing Jesus' teachings. His advice to them, for dealing with these circumstances, was to be "**wise as serpents, and harmless as doves**";



meaning to be wary of the dangers they would be faced with, but not respond in a violent manner.

4) Jesus then predicted that His disciples would be persecuted for His "**sake**", and as predicted, all the disciples were persecuted and some were even put to death for their belief in Him, and for sharing His teachings. The history of the persecution that Jesus' disciples faced has been documented in several ancient Books.

5) Jesus told His disciples not be anxious about what they would say during times of persecution, because, "**it will be given you in that hour what you will say. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.**" Here Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit, and He told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would be speaking through them, on their behalf, during the difficult times they would face.

6) Next, Jesus revealed that not only the disciples, but all people who share Jesus' teachings may be exposed to hatred and persecution; and they may even experience opposition, rejection and brutality from members of their own family.

7) Jesus advised His disciples "**when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next**"; meaning they should avoid violence whenever faced with confrontation and persecution, and move into surrounding cities to continue spreading Jesus' teachings. The full meaning of the rest of His advice may not have been completely clear to the disciples at that time, when He said "**for most certainly I tell you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man has come.**" It was noted earlier that Jesus often referred to Himself as "the Son of Man", and they may have understood that Jesus would follow them, and physically come afterwards, to help them reach the people of Israel. However, "**the cities of Israel**" may have also represented "all of God's people", and Jesus may have been saying that they would not be able to reach all of God's people, "**until the Son of Man has come.**" This last part of the sentence, "**until the Son of Man has come**", represents a point in the future. When, with Jesus' help, His disciples will be able to reach all of God's people. We will reflect in later Chapters how this prediction of Jesus will be made possible and fulfilled.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus taught His disciples that not everyone will be willing to listen to or receive His teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven. Since Jesus Himself taught this, then we can recognize this truth and understand that this is just the way things are. Jesus taught the disciples to respond to this rejection in the same way that He previously taught in Chapter 7, which was to stop sharing His teachings with them. That way, the disciples would not expose Jesus' teachings to further hatred and disrespect, and those who reject His teachings would not be able to turn their hatred against the disciples. In this Chapter, however, Jesus now adds that they must not confront

opposition either, but rather leave the area and continue to share with others elsewhere.

2) These teachings reveal that we too can expect to experience opposition from others, including our own family members. If so, we should not respond in aggression or confrontation either.

3) Jesus said, "**You will be hated by all men for my name's sake, but he who endures to the end will be saved.**" In previous Chapters we've reflected that faith, belief and following Jesus' teachings leads to life and becoming God's children. Therefore, despite receiving rejection and hatred from others "**he who endures to the end will be saved**", means that through maintaining our faith and belief in Jesus, we will be saved and receive the reward of life in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus' disciples were persecuted throughout their lives for spreading Jesus' teachings, and many of them suffered and died for it. However, it was their enduring faith and belief in Him that enabled them to continue through their extreme, difficult persecutions.

4) Jesus commanded His disciples to share His teachings with others, but it was not their responsibility to spiritually transform people. In the same way, we can realize that it is not our efforts that spiritually transform a person. Only God can spiritually transform those who are willing to listen and receive the teachings that we share with them.

## Part II

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 10, Verses 24-28

**24 "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his lord. 25 It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household! 26 Therefore don't be afraid of them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed; and hidden that will not be known. 27 What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in the ear, proclaim on the housetops. 28 Don't be afraid of those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. Rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna."**

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 10, Verses 24-28

1) Jesus said **"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his lord."** Jesus, the teacher and servant of God, here explained that His disciples are not meant to rise one above another and that no one is greater than God. Jesus also meant that His disciples were to look toward Him as their example; because it was enough for them to share His teachings with others and live according to God's will, in the same way that Jesus did.

2) Jesus then continued saying, **"If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household!"** Before we can reflect on this sentence, we must find out who "Beelzebul" was, and then interpret what Jesus meant by this reference. In the ancient Scriptures, it is recorded that there were twelve original tribes that made up the people of Israel, and at some point they broke into two regions. The northern region was made up of ten 10 of the tribes of Israel and they called their region "Israel." The southern part was made up of the two remaining tribes of Israel, and their region became known as "Judah." It is recorded that many of the people living in "Israel" turned away from the God of Israel and worshipped other gods and idols, while the people of Judah, for the most part, remained faithful and only worshipped the God of Israel. In the ancient Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, Chapter 22, Verse 51-53, it is written that King Ahaziah, who was the ruling King in Israel at that time, **"did that which was evil in God's sight... He served Baal and worshipped him, and provoked Yahweh, the God of Israel, to anger."** The term "Baal" translates into the word "Lord" and "Baal" can be found in many places throughout ancient Scriptures in reference to different pagan gods. During those times, many people of Israel worshipped multiple "Baal" gods, including King Ahaziah. In the ancient Book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, Chapter 1, it is recorded that King Ahaziah had fallen and became sick, but rather than turning to the God of Israel for an answer regarding his health, he sent his messengers to **"Go, inquire of Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I will recover of this sickness."** (The Hebrew term "Baal Zebub" literally translates in Greek into Beelzubub or Beelzebul as was used in this case by Jesus). Next, it is written that God 's angel spoke to a Holy prophet named Elijah (we'll reflect more about Elijah in the next Chapter) and told

him to go and meet King Ahaziah's messengers and tell them to return to their king and say to him: **"Is it because there is no God in Israel, that you go to inquire of Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron? Now therefore Yahweh says, "You will not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but you will surely die."** Later in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, this is written about King Ahaziah, **"So he died according to Yahweh's word which Elijah had spoken."** So, the King of Israel died because of his disbelief in God and his turning to the pagan god Beelzebul for answers.

Therefore, Jesus was preparing His disciples to expect that people would accuse their **"master of the house"**, which is Jesus, of being one who worships a pagan god, and **"those of his household"**, which are the disciples, of being worse than Jesus, because they were His disciples; all of whom would then be accused of preaching false teachings.

3) Jesus continued to say, **"don't be afraid of them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed; and hidden that will not be known."** Meaning, that they should not fear these people or their accusations, because Jesus was teaching them truth. Jesus was revealing that one day this truth will not be hidden and will eventually be revealed to everyone. He then said, **"What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in the ear, proclaim on the housetops"**, meaning that what Jesus had taught them in private, they should reveal to the public, and that they must not be afraid to share His teachings openly and confidently with everyone.

4) Jesus continued to encourage the disciples by telling them **"Don't be afraid of those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul"**, and reminded them to **"Rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna."** We reflected about Gehenna in Chapter 5, when Jesus was teaching people to guard themselves against sin in order to avoid the judgement of God. In this case, Jesus was saying that the disciples should not be afraid of people who can only kill their bodies; and by referencing "Gehenna" again, Jesus was specifically reminding His disciples that they should fear only God, because He alone can destroy both the soul and the body of those who have turned away from Him.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus taught that a disciple is not above his teacher. Therefore, we are all equal and no-one is better than another. This is a lesson in humility to remember when sharing Jesus' teachings with others.

2) In the same way that the disciples faced rejection, we too may encounter people who will reject Jesus' teachings, and even make false accusations against us in order to try to dishonor us as well.

3) Jesus commanded His disciples to confidently and boldly share His teachings, because they were teaching truth. In the same way, we are not to be afraid of how others will react when, as followers we share His teachings, because there will be

some who hear us, accept what we're sharing, and begin seeking to know God for themselves.

# Confession and Denial

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 10, Verses 29-42

29 "Aren't two sparrows sold for an assarion coin? Not one of them falls on the ground apart from your Father's will, 30 but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Therefore don't be afraid. You are of more value than many sparrows. 32 Everyone therefore who confesses me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven.

34 "Don't think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn't come to send peace, but a sword. 35 For I came to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 A man's foes will be those of his own household. 37 He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me isn't worthy of me. 38 He who doesn't take his cross and follow after me, isn't worthy of me. 39 He who seeks his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it. 40 He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. 41 He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. He who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. 42 Whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, most certainly I tell you he will in no way lose his reward."

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 10, Verses 29-42

1) Jesus explained that even the fate of sparrows falls under God's will, and He said that people "**are of more value than many sparrows.**" Jesus then immediately provided the necessary condition for people to receive their recognition of worth from God, by saying, "**Everyone therefore who confesses me before men, him I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven.**" Jesus further warned though that "**whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before my Father, who is in heaven.**" In the introduction of this book, the history of Abraham was described as written in the ancient Book of Genesis, and it told of how God spoke to Abraham and promised Him, "**I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and I will curse him who curses you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you.**" This promise that God made to Abraham in the beginning, corresponds with what Jesus was now saying here about Himself. We will reflect in upcoming Chapters how that original promise to Abraham would later be fulfilled through Jesus.

2) Next, Jesus revealed the purpose for His coming by saying, "**Don't think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn't come to send peace, but a sword**", meaning that people should not misinterpret Jesus coming as one of bringing peace

to earth, but rather, He came to separate those who accept and believe in Him from those who do not. Earlier in this Chapter, Jesus predicted that people will be hated and even persecuted for their faith in Him. He was now revealing that it is this separation of the faithful from those without faith that would fulfill His purpose.

3) Next, Jesus said, "**For I came to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's foes will be those of his own household.**" In saying this, Jesus was actually referencing an ancient prophecy that was written in the Book of Micah. Micah was a prophet who wrote that God spoke to him about the disobedience and sins of humanity. As a result, God would send judgement, and yet He would save the remainder of His people. In Micah, Chapter 7, Verses 6 -7, the prophet wrote "**For the son dishonors the father, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. But as for me, I will look to Yahweh. I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me.**" When Jesus referenced this prophecy though, He began by saying "**For I came to set...**", revealing that these words of Micah were a prophecy that would involve Jesus.

4) Jesus said that "**He who doesn't take his cross and follow after me, isn't worthy of me.**" Here Jesus was painting a word picture of death and humiliation that would have been clearly understood by His disciples. Death by crucifixion on a cross was a common form of punishment, carried out by the Romans who ruled during Jesus' time. This form of execution was a way of not only killing but also humiliating the person too. In many cases, the victims were forced to carry their own cross to the place where they would be crucified. Jesus continued to explain what He meant, by saying "**He who seeks his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.**" He used the cross as a symbolic reference to show that a life focused on the ways of this world leads to death, but giving up the ways of this world and following after Jesus' teachings leads to everlasting life; even if His followers experience rejection and humiliation because of their faith in Him.

5) Throughout this Chapter Jesus has been preparing His disciples to go out and fearlessly spread His teachings. He revealed to them how they would be received by some and rejected by others. In conclusion, He told them that "**He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me.**" Here Jesus was simply saying that anyone who receives and accepts the teachings that the disciples were sharing, would not only be receiving Jesus but would also be receiving God too. Jesus then revealed that those who receive people of faith will be rewarded for it. Jesus said people who receive prophets, righteous men, disciples and "little ones" (meaning people whose faith is just beginning), will be rewarded. Jesus went on to say "**Whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, most certainly I tell you he will in no way lose his reward.**" If we recall earlier in the Chapter, it was reflected how Jesus revealed that no one is above or greater than another. Jesus was revealing here that anyone who receives and accepts a person of faith, from prophet right down to

those "little ones", through simple efforts of kindness like offering a glass of water, will be recognized and rewarded in Heaven.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) In Verse 32, Jesus said "**Everyone therefore who confesses me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven.**" Which means that anyone who has declared their faith in Jesus will be blessed, because Jesus will declare this to God in Heaven. In Verse 33, Jesus said "**But whoever denies me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven.**" Which means that anyone who rejects Jesus before others, Jesus will also reject before God in Heaven, and they will not receive God's blessing. Therefore, believing and confessing faith in Jesus is key to being accepted by God.

2) Jesus revealed that He did not come to bring peace, but rather to separate the faithful from non-believers. It is interesting to note that both Jesus and the prophecy of Micah specifically state that the enemies of the faithful would include members of our own family. In many cases, we might hope that our families would support our decision to have faith, and yet the opposite is often true. The reasons for this may not be clear, however, Jesus has given us this teaching to remind us that this the reality that we must accept in following Him.

3) These teachings reveal that having faith also means sharing our faith with others. In so doing, we may be confronted with opposition or even rejection. However, it is through sharing our faith that new people may accept what we've shared. In this way, new people will come to receive Jesus' teachings and have faith in God. Jesus promised that He will endorse us before God for our faith in Him, and those who receive us will be rewarded in Heaven too.



# Jesus and John

## Part I

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 11, Verses 1-15

1 When Jesus had finished directing his twelve disciples, he departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. 2 Now when John heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples 3 and said to him, "Are you he who comes, or should we look for another?" 4 Jesus answered them, "**Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. 6 Blessed is he who finds no occasion for stumbling in me.**"

7 As these went their way, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John, "**What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 But what did you go out to see? A man in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. 9 But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet. 10 For this is he, of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' 11 Most certainly I tell you, among those who are born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptizer; yet he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptizer until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. 14 If you are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, who is to come. 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear.**"

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 11, Verses 1-15

1) When John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus "**Are you he who comes, or should we look for another?**" it was not because he doubted the fact that Jesus was the one predicted to come. This would be an incorrect assumption about John, because in Chapter 3, it is written that just before he baptized Jesus, John said "**I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?**" Also, in the ancient Book of John, even more is written about John the Baptist's understanding of who Jesus was. In Chapter 1, Verse 34 of the Book of John, it is written that John said, "**I have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God**", after he baptized Jesus. Therefore, John sent two of his disciples to Jesus in order to convince his own disciples that Jesus was the one whom the prophets had predicted would come.

2) Jesus would not plainly tell John's disciples that He was the one. Instead He told them to tell John to refer to some of His miracles as the proof. These miracles were predicted in the ancient Book of Isaiah. In Chapter 35, Verses 5-6, the prophet Isaiah wrote, "**Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame man will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the**

**mute will sing.**" Later in Chapter 61, Verse 1, Isaiah wrote, "**The Lord Yahweh's Spirit is on me: because Yahweh has anointed me to preach good news to the humble.**" Both John & his disciples would have been very familiar with these prophecies written by Isaiah, and by referencing them, Jesus was revealing to John's disciples that He was indeed the one whom the prophets had predicted would come.

3) Jesus then immediately said to John's disciples "**Blessed is he who finds no occasion for stumbling in me.**" In Chapter 5, it was reflected that when Jesus used the term "to stumble", He was referring to turning away from or losing faith in God. Therefore, in this case, anyone who "**finds no occasion for stumbling in me**" meant that anyone who does not reject who Jesus is, but rather accepts Him and receives His teachings about God and the Kingdom of Heaven, will be blessed.

4) Jesus wanted everyone to understand that when people went out to see John in the wilderness, they had not seen "**a reed shaken by the wind**", meaning they did not see an insignificant person. Nor was John supposed to have presented himself as one who wears fine clothing like those living in Kings' houses. Instead, Jesus said that they had seen someone who was even more significant than a prophet, because John was the one who the prophets had written about. He then said, "**For this is He of whom it is written 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you'.**" This reference pointed toward two prophecies that were written in the ancient Scriptures, by two separate prophets, each predicting that there would be someone who would prepare the way for God. The first is found in the Book of Malachi, Chapter 3, Verse 1, where the prophet Malachi wrote: "**Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple.**" The second is found in the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 40, Verse 3, where Isaiah wrote: "**The voice of one who calls out, 'Prepare the way of Yahweh in the wilderness! Make a level highway in the desert for our God.'**"

5) Next Jesus revealed that there has never been anyone who was born of women who has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet, even the least significant in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John was. Then Jesus said, "**From the days of John the Baptizer until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.**" Here Jesus was saying that since the time that John began to preach about the Kingdom of Heaven, John had been exposed to violent forces from the religious and ruling powers that opposed his teachings, and that those violent people have captured him and thrown him into prison by force.

6) Next Jesus said: "**For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. If you are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, who is to come.**" Here Jesus was referring to the rest of the prophecy that was previously mentioned from the ancient Book of Malachi. Malachi continued his prophesy from Chapter 3, Verse 1, in Chapter 4, Verse 6, where he wrote: "**Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes**" (Yahweh means God in Hebrew). Jesus was saying that John the Baptist was Elijah returned, as prophesied

by Malachi. Elijah was a man who lived long before Jesus' time, and was a prophet that was written about in the ancient Books of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings. We can read in those two Books that Elijah was a righteous man who defended the worship of God when others had abandoned their faith in God. He performed many miracles (including raising a boy from the dead) and on his last day on earth, it is written that he was taken up to Heaven in a whirlwind. Malachi's prophecy states that Elijah would return again to earth one day before the "**great and terrible day**" of God. The fact that Jesus said that John the Baptist was Elijah is a very significant point, because it meant that Elijah had returned as John the Baptist and that it was he who was the messenger to prepare the way for God, as predicted by the prophets. Jesus will teach more about the "**great and terrible day**" of God in later Chapters.

7) Jesus said, "**If you are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, who is come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear**", meaning that those who hear these words and open their hearts and minds to accept them, can believe what Jesus had said.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) By referencing the ancient prophecies about John and also confirming His own identity through prophecy, Jesus revealed that both He and John were the ones who the prophets had predicted would one day come.

## Part II

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 11, Verses 16-30

16 **“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call to their companions 17 and say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you didn’t dance. We mourned for you, and you didn’t lament.’**

**18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’**

**19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.”**

20 Then he began to denounce the cities in which most of his mighty works had been done, because they didn’t repent. 21 **“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you,**

**Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.**

**22 But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of**

**judgment than for you. 23 You, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, you will go down to Hades. For if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which**

**were done in you, it would have remained until today. 24 But I tell you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, on the day of judgment, than for you.”**

25 At that time, Jesus answered, **“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you hid these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to infants. 26 Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in your sight. 27 All things have been delivered to me by my Father. No one knows the Son, except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and he to whom the Son desires to reveal him.**

**28 “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give**

**you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and**

**humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”**

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 11, Verses 16-30

*In the rest of this Chapter, Jesus revealed the stubbornness of the peoples' beliefs, and how their hearts resisted repentance and acceptance of who John the Baptist and Jesus really were.*

1) Immediately after Jesus explained the significance and importance of who John was, He then said, **“to what shall I compare this generation?.”** Jesus used a comparison of children who call to their companions to participate with them in their dancing and weeping, but the companions refuse to participate. This comparison of unwilling children illustrates the stubbornness of the people who were unwilling to accept the teachings of John and Jesus. He further confirmed this by highlighting the fact that people rejected John as being possessed by a demon and accused Jesus of being a gluttonous drunkard, whose friends were sinners.

2) Jesus then said, "**But wisdom is justified by her children.**" Wisdom can be subjective and interpreted differently, based on each person's own opinion and internal belief. However, truth is truth, and truly wise people will recognize and accept truth, despite the fact that they may have had a different opinion before realizing the truth. Therefore, what Jesus was saying was: Wise people realize and accept truth, whereas, unwise people will reject truth and justify their own beliefs, even after truth has been revealed to them. Jesus then provided proof of this statement, by pointing out and denouncing the cities where He had performed many miracles, where people had seen His miracles would still not believe in Him or repent of their sins.

Jesus denounced the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, which were two cities in Israel where He had performed miracles, and He compared them with the cities of Tyre and Sidon, which were two non-Israelite cities, saying "**if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon that were done in you, they would have repented.**" Meaning that, after seeing Jesus' miracles they refused to believe in Him, even though He Himself was an Israelite. Yet, if He had performed those same miracles in the non-Israelite cities they would have repented of their sins and believed in Jesus.

3) Next, Jesus revealed that "**on the day of judgment**" the fate of those unrepentant people, who had witnessed His miracles, would be worse than the fate of the non-Israelite people who had not witnessed them. Jesus further extended the same warning to the city of Capernaum for the same reason, referring to the ancient city of Sodom (mentioned in Chapter 10, which God destroyed because of its' peoples sinfulness), suggesting that even the people of Sodom would have believed in His miracles had they been performed there, and that city would have been spared destruction.

4) Jesus said, "**I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you hid these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to infants.**" Jesus was saying that God hid the recognition of who John and Jesus really were, the meaning of Jesus' teachings, and the acceptance of His miracles, from those who considered themselves to be wise; and yet, these things were accepted by those who were open to what was being revealed to them. Jesus referred to those who accepted Him as being infants, meaning that their eyes and ears were being opened in a spiritual way just like new born infants first experiencing the physical world around them.

5) Jesus then said "**All things have been delivered to me by my Father. No one knows the Son, except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and he to whom the Son desires to reveal him**", meaning that the knowledge of God has been given to Jesus, and that knowledge will be given to those who Jesus desires to reveal God to. We've reflected that God is revealed to those who honestly seek him with humble, open and willing hearts. This new statement, however, adds that it is through Jesus that God is revealed to people.

## Considerations for people seeking to know God

1) The warnings which Jesus made against the people of those ancient cities is also a warning to all people who hear Jesus' teachings but refuse to believe and repent. Therefore, we can keep this warning present in our minds, knowing that there will be a "**day of judgement**" when everyone will be accountable for their beliefs. Further to Jesus' point though, for those who know Jesus' teachings and yet continue to resist changing their ways, Jesus revealed that their fate would be much worse than those who have never been exposed to Jesus.

2) Jesus' teaching on the rejection of John and Jesus, reveals that people can be fooled by worldly wisdom, and that nothing can satisfy unbelieving people who will stubbornly reject any evidence that may be presented to them.

3) Jesus taught that God and Jesus work together. Jesus has been given the knowledge of God, and through Jesus' teachings this knowledge is given to those whom Jesus desires to reveal it to. However, in order to receive the knowledge of God people must first be open and willing to receive it.

4) Jesus invited all people to "**Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.**" This is an offering to lay our burdens at Jesus' feet in faith that He will give us peace; and for those who do, Jesus promised "**for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls.**" This is an incredible promise that Jesus will give rest to all who are troubled in their souls. His promise of rest goes out to all who place their faith and trust in Him and then transfer their burdens upon Him.

5) Jesus then said, "**take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.**" From this we see that Jesus wants all people to learn from Him, and that God will be revealed through Jesus to those who seek Him. These words are an extension of the promise that Jesus made in Chapter 7, when he said, "**Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. To him who knocks it will be opened.**" These promises reveal that, through Jesus, the knowledge of God will be revealed to everyone who sincerely desires to learn from Him.

# Sabbath Law and Mercy

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 12, Verses 1-14

1 At that time, Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the grain fields. His disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said to him, "Behold, your disciples do what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."

3 But he said to them, "**Haven't you read what David did, when he was hungry, and those who were with him; 4 how he entered into God's house, and ate the show bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 Or have you not read in the law, that on the Sabbath day, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are guiltless? 6 But I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. 7 But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, 'you wouldn't have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.**"

9 He departed from there, and went into their synagogue. 10 And behold there was a man with a withered hand. They asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" that they might accuse him. 11 He said to them, "**What man is there among you, who has one sheep, and if this one falls into a pit on the Sabbath day, won't he grab on to it, and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day.**" 13 Then he told the man, "**Stretch out your hand.**" He stretched it out; and it was restored whole, just like the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out, and conspired against him, how they might destroy him.

## Reflections Matthew, Chapter 12, Verses 1-14

1) The Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of doing something against the laws found in ancient Scripture, by plucking and eating grain on the Sabbath day. The particular law to which they referred is found in the Book of Exodus, Chapter 20, Verses 8-12. This law states that the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week is a Holy day of rest, called "the Sabbath" day. During that day, the people of Israel must not work in any way, and they must dedicate the day toward the worship of God. Even the act of picking grain would have technically been considered work. Jesus responded to the Pharisees by pointing toward two examples in ancient Scriptures, that illustrate some exceptions to the laws. He first referred to David, who was mentioned in the introduction of this book. David had been chosen by God to become the King of Israel, but before he became King, he was on the run from the ruling King who wanted to kill Him. During this time, according to the Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, Chapter 21, Verses 3-7, David asked a priest named Ahimelech, for food for himself and his men. The only food that the priest could provide was the Holy bread, known as the "show bread." According to the ancient Book of Exodus, Chapter 25, Verse 30, bread must always be present before God, on a table within the Israelite's place of worship. The priest asked David if his men were Holy. David responded that they were, then the priest gave David



the show bread that had been dedicated to God. The second example that Jesus gave, referenced the ancient Book of Leviticus, Chapter 24, Verses 5-9, and the ancient Book of Numbers, Chapter 28, Verses 9-10. In these Scriptures, priests are instructed about the work they must do on the Sabbath, to prepare for worship in the temple. This reference would have been clearly understood by the Pharisees, because this work of the priests was acceptable to God, and therefore an exception to the law.

2) The two examples that Jesus gave to defend the disciples' actions for picking grains on the Sabbath focused on the worship of God. The show bread given to David was dedicated to God in the temple, and the priests' work in the temple was to prepare for the worship of God. Jesus then said, "**But I tell you that one greater than the temple is here**", meaning that Jesus Himself was greater than the place of worship, and His disciples were following Him and learning how to worship God from His teachings.

3) As in Chapter 9, Jesus again accused the Pharisees of not knowing the Scripture found in the ancient Book of Hosea, by saying to them, "**But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice.**" In this case, Jesus was pointing out that the Pharisees weren't showing mercy to His disciples, when they should have been merciful because the disciples were following Jesus and seeking to know God. Again, the particular Verse that Jesus was referring to was Hosea, Chapter 6, Verse 6, where the prophet wrote "**For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.**" Here Jesus was telling the Pharisees that they did not understand these words written in that ancient Scripture, in that God's desire is for people to show mercy toward each other and to seek the knowledge of Him, more than He desires the tradition of giving offerings to Him.

4) Jesus entered the temple and found a man with a withered hand. Again, the Pharisees tried to test Jesus against the ancient laws, asking Him "**Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?**" Jesus then made a very clear statement saying "**It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day**", and then He healed the man.

5) The accusations made by the Pharisees against Jesus and His disciples revealed their cruel intentions and hypocrisy. Their false accusations, although made in the name of religion, criticized actions that were both innocent and acceptable to God. Jesus exposed their true character in His response to the Pharisees, a characterization that was confirmed when later "**the Pharisees went out, and conspired against him, how they might destroy him**".

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The actions of the Pharisees, who were religious leaders, teach us to be aware of, and not led astray, by people who claim to be speaking or acting in the name of God but actually have their own hidden and opposite agendas.



2) The response of Jesus to the Pharisees' accusations reveal that God requires us to practice true acts of kindness and mercy toward others, even if those acts conflict with established religious traditions.

# Healing and The Holy Spirit

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 12, Verses 15-37

15 Jesus, perceiving that, withdrew from there. Great multitudes followed him; and he healed them all, 16 and commanded them that they should not make him known: 17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, 18 "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit on him. He will proclaim justice to the nations. 19 He will not strive, nor shout; neither will anyone hear his voice in the streets. 20 He won't break a bruised reed. He won't quench a smoking flax, until he leads justice to victory. 21 In his name, the nations will hope."

22 Then one possessed by a demon, blind and mute, was brought to him and he healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. 23 All the multitudes were amazed, and said, "Can this be the son of David?" 24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "This man does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebul, the prince of the demons." 25 Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said to them, **"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27 If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 28 But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then God's Kingdom has come upon you. 29 Or how can one enter into the house of the strong man, and plunder his goods, unless he first bind the strong man? Then he will plunder his house.**

**30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who doesn't gather with me, scatters. 31 Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.**

**32 Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come.**

**33 "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 You offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. 35 The good man out of his good treasure brings out good things, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings out evil things. 36 I tell you that every idle word that men speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."**

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 12, Verses 15-37

1) It is written that Jesus healed a great multitude of people, and after He had healed them, He commanded them **"that they should not make Him known."** Just as with the leper and the blind man from previous Chapters, Jesus' intentions were always

to divert honor and credit for His miracles away from Himself and toward God. These words also reveal that He wanted to avoid anything that resembled pride or public recognition. Next, Matthew wrote that by saying this Jesus fulfilled another prophecy from Isaiah. This prophecy can be found in the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 42, Verses 1-4, where Isaiah wrote that God had revealed to him, "**Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit on him. He will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout, nor raise his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street. He won't break a bruised reed. He won't quench a dimly burning wick. He will faithfully bring justice. He will not fail nor be discouraged, until he has set justice on the earth, and the islands will wait for his law.**" This prophecy not only revealed that Jesus did not want others to speak about Him in the streets, but it also states that Jesus would faithfully bring justice and set it upon the earth. We will reflect more about Jesus bringing justice upon the earth in later Chapters. One other very significant Verse in this prophecy states that God revealed to Isaiah, "**I have put my spirit on him.**" Once again, this refers to the "Holy Spirit", and this Verse predicted that God would put His Holy Spirit on Jesus. This too was fulfilled when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, when He was baptized by John, as was previously reflected upon in Chapter 3.

2) The statement that Jesus "**healed them all**", showed that He did not discourage anyone. Instead, He accepted and healed everyone who followed Him, and had come to Him for healing.

3) After healing the blind and mute man, and casting out the demon which possessed him, the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out the demon by the power of Beelzebul, rather than admitting that His miracles were performed through the power of the Holy Spirit of God. (Details about who Beelzebul was can be found in the reflections from Chapter 10). Here Jesus showed His great wisdom by revealing the foolishness of the Pharisees' comment. If demons were casting out demons, that meant they would be working against themselves, and yet the Pharisees comment also revealed that people can be blinded by their own stubborn, false beliefs, and will not be convinced otherwise, even when they have been shown the most powerful evidence.

4) When Jesus asked the Pharisees "**by whom do your children cast them out?**", Here He was referring to those who learned from and studied under the Pharisees themselves, who also cast out demons. Jesus was pointing out that if they had cast out demons by the Holy Spirit of God, why then would the Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out the demon by the power of Beelzebul. Jesus then said, "**Therefore they will be your judges**", meaning that the Pharisees' own people will judge for themselves, the truth of the Pharisees' accusation against Jesus.

5) Jesus then provided a serious warning, saying, "**every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him;**

**but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come."** Jesus was clearly stating: I) That whoever commits blasphemy or even speaks against the Holy Spirit is committing a serious offense that will never be forgiven. So, when the Pharisees credited demons for that which actually came from the Holy Spirit, they were in fact condemning themselves. II) Jesus here identified that the Holy Spirit was distinct from Himself, by revealing that forgiveness would be given to whoever speaks against the Son of Man but forgiveness would never be given to whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) It was written about the multitudes following Jesus, that He **"healed them all."** He did not discourage anyone, but rather He accepted and healed everyone who followed Him. Therefore, this can be an encouragement for us to trust and follow Jesus, knowing that everyone who chooses to follow Jesus will be accepted by Him.

2) By healing everyone without prejudice, Jesus was showing acceptance, kindness and mercy toward everyone. In doing so, Jesus provided us with an example of how to behave toward others.

3) The detailed response that Jesus gave to the Pharisees' accusation provides much for us to consider and interpret for our own lives, because: I) We too can become guilty by the words that we speak. II) We too can resist the truth, even when it is revealed to us. III) We too can resist the operations of God's Holy Spirit working in our hearts and choose to follow our own stubborn beliefs.

4) Jesus referred to an unclean spirit as **"the strong man"**, when He said: **"Or how can one enter into the house of the strong man"**, the house that Jesus was referring to is the man himself, who had been a house for the unclean spirit to live in. He then continued **"and plunder his goods, unless he first bind the strong man"**, meaning, before the Holy Spirit can enter into a person, their inner force of darkness must first be overcome. The power of the Holy Spirit is stronger than an unclean spirit, and can overcome it, therefore, people are subject to one power or the other. Either they allow the forces of darkness to dwell within, or they allow the Holy Spirit to overcome those dark forces. Next, Jesus said, **"He who is not with me is against me, and he who doesn't gather with me, scatters."** This comment confirms that we all live one way or the other, and it enforces the importance of deciding to be with Jesus.

5) Jesus said **"Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit"**, and then He continued saying **"For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings out good things, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings out evil things."** Jesus compared fruit to words, in that, we can know a tree by the type of fruit that it bears, and in the same way, we can

know a person by the words they speak. Jesus completed this teaching by saying **"every idle word that men speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."** This warning given by Jesus further magnifies the serious attention that should be paid to the words we speak. Once again, Jesus referred to the **"day of Judgement"**, when all will have to account for the words we say, and how our words will either justify us or condemn us on that day.

# Signs

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 12, Verses 38-50

38 Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." 39 But he answered them, "**An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will stand up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, someone greater than Jonah is here. 42 The Queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, someone greater than Solomon is here.**

**43 When an unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and doesn't find it. 44 Then he says, 'I will return into my house from which I came out,' and when he has come back, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. 45 Then he goes, and takes with himself seven other spirits more evil than he is, and they enter in and dwell there. The last state of that man becomes worse than the first. Even so will it be also to this evil generation."**

46 While he was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, seeking to speak to him. 47 One said to him, "Behold, your mother and your brothers stand outside, seeking to speak to you." 48 But he answered him who spoke to him, "**Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?**" 49 He stretched out his hand toward his disciples, and said, "**Behold, my mother and my brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.**"

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 12, Verses 38-50

1) The scribes and Pharisees wanted Jesus to give them a sign in order to convince them of who He was. Jesus had been teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven and performing great miracles which demonstrated who He was, and yet the scribes and Pharisees would not believe in Him. As a result, Jesus refused to give them a sign and submit to their demands. This revealed that Jesus provides enough evidence to convince people to have faith in Him. If they still refuse to believe, He leaves them to make up their own minds, based on the stubbornness of their hearts.

2) Jesus responded to the Scribes' & Pharisees' request saying "**no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet.**" The history of Jonah being held in the belly of a whale for three days and three nights, can be found in the ancient Book of Jonah, Chapter 1. Here Jesus used this reference about Jonah as a comparison and prediction about Himself, saying; "**For as Jonah was three days and three nights**

**in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."** We will reflect more about this prediction from Jesus in later Chapters, and how it comes true.

3) Jesus warned the scribes, Pharisees and the generation to whom He was speaking, that they would be condemned at the time of judgment by the men of Nineveh and the Queen of the South, for their disbelief in Him. The history of the men of Nineveh can be found in the ancient Book of Jonah, Chapter 3. God spoke to the prophet Jonah and told him to go and preach to the people of Nineveh. The people of Nineveh were living sinful lives and had turned away from God, but then they repented of their evil ways and turned back to God in faith, after hearing the preaching of the prophet Jonah. Jesus then referred to Himself, saying "**someone greater than Jonah is here**" was preaching directly to them. Jesus' reference to the Queen of the South referred to the Queen of Sheba, who went seeking wisdom from King Solomon. The history of this event can be found in the ancient Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, Chapter 10, Verses 1-14; and in Verse 23 of that Chapter, it is written that "**king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom.**" Again, Jesus referred to Himself saying "**someone greater than Solomon is here**", who was teaching in front of them and yet they would not believe. These words also expose the scribes and Pharisees lack of wisdom, because they did not recognize Jesus for who He was, even after listening to Him, and possibly witnessing some of His miracles.

4) Jesus taught about an unclean spirit leaving a man and later returning back to the "**house**" from which it came, and it is important to understand the depth of this teaching. Earlier in this Chapter, Jesus revealed that He cast out a demon by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, regarding unclean spirits, Jesus taught "**when he has come back, he finds it empty, swept and put in order**", meaning that after the Holy Spirit has cleansed a person, they are renewed and free from the dark forces that were present in their life before. Jesus continued saying, "**Then he goes, and takes with himself seven other spirits more evil than he is, and they enter in and dwell there**", meaning, that just because the Holy Spirit has cast an unclean spirit out of a person's life, doesn't mean that the dark forces will stay out of the person's life forever. Jesus was saying, that when the Holy Spirit casts out an unclean spirit, the unclean spirit will attempt to return with greater strength than it had the first time. Jesus continued teaching, "**The last state of that man becomes worse than the first**", meaning, that if the unclean spirit is allowed to re-enter again, the result will be that the person's spiritual condition will become worse than it was originally.

### **Consideration for people seeking to know God**

1) The scribes and Pharisees wanted Jesus to give them a sign in order to convince them of who He was. Jesus refused to provide another sign, because He knew that nothing would convince them to put their faith in Him. In the same way, we can also recognize that not everyone will be willing to put their faith and belief in Jesus

either. Consequently, we can accept that the response of those who have heard or read His teachings, and still refuse to believe in Him, is based on their own stubborn hearts, and that they'll refuse to believe regardless of the circumstance or any signs given.

2) Once again, Jesus mentioned the time of "**the judgement**", and at this time He clearly stated that the generation to whom He was speaking would be condemned for their disbelief in Him. This harsh warning is a key teaching about the importance of believing in Jesus, as a requirement during the time of judgement.

3) Jesus' teachings on evil forces and the power of the Holy Spirit reveal how both of these forces can impact our lives. It is the Holy Spirit that overcomes evil forces. Therefore, He was teaching to continuously look to and rely on God's Holy Spirit for our strength and protection.

4) Jesus pointed out that the disciples who followed Him were His spiritual family. This reveals that by studying Jesus' teachings we can learn how to live according to God's will and become part of Jesus' spiritual family too.



# Kingdom of Heaven – Parables 1

## Part I

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 13, Verses 1-23

1 On that day Jesus went out of the house, and sat by the seaside. 2 Great multitudes gathered to him, so that he entered into a boat, and sat, and all the multitude stood on the beach. 3 He spoke to them many things in parables, saying, **“Behold, a farmer went out to sow. 4 As he sowed, some seeds fell by the roadside, and the birds came and devoured them. 5 Others fell on rocky ground, where they didn’t have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of earth. 6 When the sun had risen, they were scorched. Because they had no root, they withered away. 7 Others fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked them. 8 Others fell on good soil, and yielded fruit: some one hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”**

10 The disciples came, and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?”

11 He answered them, **“To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but it is not given to them. 12 For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever doesn’t have, from him will be taken away even that which he has. 13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they don’t see, and hearing, they don’t hear, neither do they understand. 14 In them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says, ‘By hearing you will hear, and will in no way understand; Seeing you will see, and will in no way perceive: 15 for this people’s heart has grown callous, their ears are dull of hearing, they have closed their eyes; or else perhaps they might perceive with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and would turn again; and I would heal them.’ 16 “But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. 17 For most certainly I tell you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which you see, and didn’t see them; and to hear the things which you hear, and didn’t hear them.**

**18 “Hear, then, the parable of the farmer. 19 When anyone hears the word of the Kingdom, and doesn’t understand it, the evil one comes, and snatches away that which has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown by the roadside. 20 What was sown on the rocky places, this is he who hears the word, and immediately with joy receives it; 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while. When oppression or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. 22 What was sown among the thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. 23 What was sown on the good ground, this is he who hears the word, and understands it, who most certainly bears fruit, and produces, some one hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty.”**

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 13, Verses 1-23

1) The parable of the sower was about accepting and sharing Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven and the knowledge of God. Jesus' disciples asked Him why He spoke in parables, and He responded: **"To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but it is not given to them. For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever doesn't have, from him will be taken away even that which he has."** Jesus was not speaking about including or excluding anyone, or that some people will be given while others will not, in an exclusive way. When Jesus said, **"whoever has"** and **"whoever doesn't have"**, He was specifically referring to a person's faith. To know God, people must first have faith and believe in God, next they must seek to know Him, and finally they must be open to receiving Him into their lives. Therefore, it is through faith and seeking to know God that people are given the understanding of Him. And, if a person chooses not to follow their faith, or worse denies their faith, in the end whatever faith they might have had will be lost. This is what Jesus meant by saying; **"but whoever doesn't have, from him will be taken away even that which he has."**

2) Jesus said, **"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they don't see, and hearing, they don't hear, neither do they understand."** He then revealed that a prophecy of Isaiah's was fulfilled by what He had just explained. This prophecy can be found in the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 6, Verses 9-10, where the prophet wrote **"He said, Go and tell this people, you hear indeed, but don't understand; and you see indeed, but don't perceive. Make the heart of this people fat. Make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed."** In this prophecy of Isaiah, it is written that the people's eyes, ears and hearts were made closed from the knowledge of God. Otherwise, they would **"turn"** and be **"healed"**, indicating that if people were freely given the knowledge of God, they would not appreciate God and would only turn to Him for their own personal benefit. There are a couple subtle differences between the words that Jesus used when quoting Isaiah's prophecy, versus the actual prophecy itself. I) Jesus' words describe the people themselves as having closed their eyes, dulled their ears and hardened their hearts against the knowledge of God, whereas, Isaiah stated people will be made unable to see, hear & understand. II) Jesus said that if they did **"perceive"** and **"turn"** then **"I would heal them"**, which means that it is through Jesus that people can see, hear and understand the knowledge of God, and for those who do turn to Him in faith and belief, He would spiritually **"heal"** them. Therefore, Isaiah's prophecy was also pointing toward Jesus as the healer who reveals the knowledge of God to those who seek Him. This also supports Jesus' teaching in Chapter 11, Verse 27, where He said **"All things have been delivered to me by my Father. No one knows the Son, except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and he to whom the Son desires to reveal him."**

3) In Chapter 10, it is written that Jesus gave His disciples authority over unclean spirits and the power to heal every disease and sickness. He then sent them out to preach "**The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand**", and commanded them not to take anything with them, which taught them to depend on God for their needs. In this Chapter Jesus told His disciples "**blessed is your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear.**" The disciples were blessed because, through their faith and belief in Jesus, they were understanding all that they were seeing and hearing, and they were receiving the knowledge of God through Jesus. Jesus told them that many prophets and righteous people before them would have desired to see and hear what they were experiencing, but they never did. Therefore, the disciples experienced a deeper knowledge of God than some of the prophets and righteous men who had lived before them, because of Jesus' teachings.

4) Jesus explained that the parable of the farmer sowing seed was about how people respond when they hear His teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven and the Word of God, and how for some people faith grows, while for others it does not. His explanation was very clear, and it revealed that not everyone will respond in the same way, and that only some will fully respond to the point of "**bearing fruit.**" I) Some will not understand His teachings at all, and their faith will never develop; for these people, Jesus said "**the evil one comes, and snatches away that which has been sown in his heart.**" II) Some people will immediately receive and accept His teachings with joy. However, when they face opposition because of their faith, they "**stumble**", or lose their faith. For these people, Jesus said "**When oppression or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.**" III) For others, their faith will fade away because of earthly cares and their heart's attachment to the riches of this world. For these people, Jesus said "**but the cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.**" IV) Finally, Jesus explained that, "**What was sown on the good ground, this is he who hears the Word, and understands it, who most certainly bears fruit, and produces.**" These are the people who understand and do not lose faith in Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven and the Word of God, and their faith continues to grow. They produce fruit by following Jesus' teachings, living according to God's will, increasing their faith and knowledge of Him, and by sharing their faith with others.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) When Jesus said; "**Seeing they don't see, and hearing, they don't hear, neither do they understand**", He revealed that it isn't simply by sight or through sound that people will be given the knowledge of God. Instead, the knowledge of God begins with an open and willing heart, supported by faith and belief, before people can see, hear or understand God. And it is through Jesus' teachings that the knowledge of God is revealed. In Chapter 11, Jesus said, "**No one knows the Son, except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and he to whom the Son desires to reveal him**", meaning that the knowledge of God has been given to Jesus, and that knowledge will be given to whom Jesus desires to reveal it.

2) Through the parable of the sower, Jesus taught how the Word of God's Kingdom is accepted or rejected by people. This provides us with an insight into how others can see and hear, and yet still refuse to accept what they see or hear. As a result, their faith does not grow and they never fully develop spiritually to understand the Word of God.

3) Jesus told His disciples that many prophets and righteous people before them would have desired to see and hear what they were experiencing. This is also an exciting message for us because, like His disciples, we can study and follow Jesus' teachings; and through Jesus, the knowledge of God will become revealed to us as well.

4) Jesus taught that not all seeds sown in the good ground will produce the same amount of fruit, saying that "**some one hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty.**" This reveals that by living according to God's will, people do not all increase in faith and understanding of God's Word, or share their faith, to the same extent as each other. Jesus does not indicate that this is a problem. However, Jesus said "**What was sown on the good ground, this is he who hears the Word, and understands it, who most certainly bears fruit, and produces**", meaning that by bearing fruit and producing, we are increasing our faith and understanding of God's Word and sharing our faith with others, to the extent we are able.

5) Jesus said, "**For whoever does the will of my Father who is in Heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.**" In saying this, Jesus did not mean to show disrespect to his earthly family. When He said this, He stretched out His hand and pointed toward His disciples, meaning that those who were following Him were doing the will of God, and therefore belong to His spiritual family.

## Part II

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 13, Verses 24-43

24 He set another parable before them, saying, **“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field, 25 but while people slept, his enemy came and sowed darnel weeds also among the wheat, and went away. 26 But when the blade sprang up and produced fruit, then the darnel weeds appeared also. 27 The servants of the householder came and said to him, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where did these darnel weeds come from?’ 28 He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and gather them up?’ 29 But he said, ‘No, lest perhaps while you gather up the darnel weeds, you root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the harvest time I will tell the reapers, “First, gather up the darnel weeds, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.”**”

31 He set another parable before them, saying, **“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field; 32 which indeed is smaller than all seeds. But when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches.”**

33 He spoke another parable to them. **“The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, until it was all leavened.”**

34 Jesus spoke all these things in parables to the multitudes; and without a parable, he didn’t speak to them, 35 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying,  
“I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world.”

36 Then Jesus sent the multitudes away, and went into the house. His disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the darnel weeds of the field.” 37 He answered them, **“He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 38 the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the children of the Kingdom; and the darnel weeds are the children of the evil one. 39 The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40 As therefore the darnel weeds are gathered up and burned with fire; so will it be at the end of this age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and those who do iniquity, 42 and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”**

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 13, Verses 24-43

1) Jesus continued to teach in parables to reveal the ways of the Kingdom of Heaven. In His parable of the wheat and darnel seeds, He said; "**He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man**", which was a reference to Himself. He then said, "**The field is the world; and the good seed, these are the children of the Kingdom.**" As was explained in the parable of the sower, the good seeds are people who understand Jesus' teachings, live according to God's will and share their faith with others. Jesus continued, saying "**the darnel weeds are the children of the evil one**", meaning people who reject Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven and the Word of God, and don't live according to God's will. Jesus taught that both seeds are sown together, meaning that both types of people live together in the world. He then warned that there will be a "**harvest time**" when all people will be separated from each other.

In Chapter 9, Verses 37-38 Jesus referred to "**the harvest**" when He said "**The harvest indeed is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into His harvest.**" In this Chapter, Jesus explained that "**the harvest is the end of this age**", when there will be a separation of "**the children of the Kingdom**" from the "**children of the evil one.**" In previous Chapters, Jesus also referred to a time of "**judgement**" as well as the "**harvest**", and He has now referred to that time as "**the end of this age.**" All three of these terms refer to the same event, and Jesus will teach more about this time in later Chapters.

2) In the first two parables of this Chapter, Jesus explained that the seed referred to Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven and the knowledge of God, and how people receive and share the "Word of God" with others. The next two parables reveal how the "Word of God" works. The seed must mature in a person in order for their faith to grow and increase their knowledge of God. In the same way that a mustard seed becomes a tree and yeast makes bread rise, the seed of "God's Word" begins as a small instrument of change and grows within a person to spiritually transform them into someone new, as they follow Jesus' teachings and seek to understand the "Word of God" more deeply.

3) Matthew wrote that by teaching in parables Jesus fulfilled another prophecy. This prophecy can be found in the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 78, Verses 1-2, where it is written "**Hear my teaching, my people. Turn your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable. I will utter dark sayings of old.**" In Jesus fulfilling this prophecy, several significant points are revealed. I) The prophecy states "**Hear my teachings, my people.**" This is significant because earlier in this Chapter it was reflected that people who hear and understand Jesus' teachings, are those who turn to Him in faith and openly receive the knowledge of God. Therefore, "**my people**" refers to those who have faith and openly accept the Word of God. II) Jesus' speaking in parables fulfills the prophecy "**I will open my mouth in a parable**" III) The prophecy states "**I will utter dark sayings of old.**" Here the word "**dark**" is not referring to something sinister, but rather to something that is hidden,



and the term **“of old”** refers to something ancient. Matthew expands upon this to describe the prophecy **“I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world.”**

Therefore, through breaking down the prophecy in this way, it is revealed that Jesus was teaching God's people ancient, hidden knowledge of God.

Although the prophecy of speaking in parables was fulfilled by Jesus, the complete Chapter of Psalms 78 is extremely relevant here too. The entire Chapter of Psalms 78 is a summary of God's relationship with the people of Israel, right from the time of Jacob, through to King David. Specifically, it summarizes the great miracles that God performed to bring the people of Israel safely out of Egypt, and how He sustained them while they lived in the wilderness. It also tells how God protected the Israelites and **“drove out the nations before them”**, while leading them into the promised land and how He struck down their enemies, as they fought and won many battles throughout generations. Meanwhile, it recalls how the people of Israel continuously lost their faith in God and turned away from Him, as it is written **“they didn't believe in God, and didn't trust in His salvation”**, and **“they still sinned, and didn't believe in His wondrous works.”** Because of this, God abandoned the people of Israel and it is written that God **“delivered His strength into captivity, his glory into the adversary's hand.”** This too prophetically pointed toward Jesus. Just as the Israelites of the past sinned and did not believe in God's miracles, in the same way, Jesus was preaching to people who refused to believe in His miracles or live according to God's will too. And in consequence, a disturbing description of the fate that awaits those who reject God is provided by Jesus.

Finally, the end of Psalms 78 states that God **“awakened as one out of sleep, like a mighty man who shouts by reason of wine. He struck his adversaries backward. He put them to a perpetual reproach. Moreover He rejected the tent of Joseph, and didn't choose the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which he loved. He built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which he has established forever. He also chose David his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that have their young, he brought him to be the shepherd of Jacob, his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he was their shepherd according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his Hands.”** This final section of Psalm 78 revealed that God returned to **“His people”** to provide their promised inheritance through David, who would shepherd them by the integrity of his heart. Therefore, from that point forward the inheritance of God's people came through the integrity of their hearts - meaning their faith and belief in God - as was demonstrated by David. This also prophetically pointed toward Jesus, because Jesus was a direct descendant from the line of King David. We will reflect in later Chapters how Jesus becomes the shepherd for God's people, by the integrity of their hearts, through their faith and belief in Him.

4) Jesus painted a terrifying picture of the **“harvest time”** in the parable of the darnel weeds to His disciples. Jesus revealed that **“the field”** of the harvest **“is the**

**world**", and the harvest itself **"is the end of this age."** Jesus said that the **"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and those who do iniquity, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth."** Meaning, at that time all temptations that lead people away from their faith in God, and all people who **"do iniquity"**, or live sinfully, will be destroyed in a horrific way. Jesus will reveal more specific details about the time of **"the end of this age"** and how people can avoid this horrific destruction, in future Chapters.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) In Chapter 9, Jesus asked His disciples to **"Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into His harvest."** This Chapter, reveals that in time of **"the harvest"** there will be a separation of people who have faith in God from those who do not. Jesus' prayer from Chapter 9, teaches that we are not meant to judge others. Instead, Jesus wants us to share His teachings and our faith with everyone, and to pray that others will share their faith before **"the harvest time"** comes.

2) The parables in this Chapter reflect that the "seeds" of Jesus' teachings and the knowledge of God, can grow within a person to spiritually transform them into a new person of faith. However, in the previous Chapter Jesus explained that not all people will receive His teachings, and their faith may never develop. Jesus' prayer from Chapter 9 asked that we pray for more people to share their faith with others. Although, Jesus wants us to share our faith, transforming others into people of faith is beyond our control.

3) Although the **"end of this age"** will be a time of great terror and separation, Jesus gave us a glorious, positive glimpse of the final result for those who remain firm in faith, when He said **"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father."**

4) Jesus finished His teaching about the **"end of this age"** with a key sentence, saying **"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."** This is a reference to Jesus' earlier teaching about those who hear but do not understand. Therefore, these words are for those who do have faith and understand His teachings. Jesus was telling us to take His words seriously and recognize that He was revealing ancient teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven and the knowledge of God.



## Part III

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 13, Verses 44-58

**44 "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in the field, which a man found, and hid. In his joy, he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field.**

**45 "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46 who having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.**

**47 "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet, that was cast into the sea, and gathered some fish of every kind, 48 which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach. They sat down, and gathered the good into containers, but the bad they threw away. 49 So will it be in the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."**

51 Jesus said to them, **"Have you understood all these things?"** They answered him, "Yes, Lord." 52 He said to them, **"Therefore every scribe who has been made a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a householder, who brings out of his treasure new and old things."**

53 When Jesus had finished these parables, he departed from there. 54 Coming into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom, and these mighty works? 55 Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother called Mary, and his brothers, James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? 56 Aren't all of his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all of these things?" 57 They were offended by him. But Jesus said to them, **"A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and in his own house."** 58 He didn't do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 13, Verses 44-58

1) By comparing the Kingdom of Heaven with hidden treasure, Jesus revealed that the knowledge of the Kingdom of Heaven is something hidden, which must be searched for and an effort must be made to find. In the same way, the parable of the merchant seeking the perfect pearl reveals finding the Kingdom of Heaven requires diligently search. In both examples, Jesus taught that the true value of this treasure is far greater than anything else that could be owned in this world.

2) Jesus used a parable of the net filled with fish, which are later separated on the beach, as a comparison for the future **"end of the world."** Once again this is a reference to the time of the "end of the age", when there will be a separation between faithful and unfaithful people. Again, Jesus presented a desperate future picture for those whom He referred to as **"wicked."**

3) Jesus began His next parable by saying, **“Therefore every scribe.”** In Jesus' time, a scribe was a person who both studied the ancient Holy Scriptures of God and then taught those Scriptures to others. However, Jesus then pointed toward a particular type of scribe, saying **“who has been made a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven”**, meaning a scribe who also understands and teaches about the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus' teachings were about the Kingdom of Heaven, were new and not found in the ancient Holy Scriptures. Therefore, Jesus was pointing toward scribes who would also be disciples of Jesus' teachings. Jesus then continued on to say that this type of scribe **“is like a man who is a householder.”** In the original text of Matthew, the word **“householder”** was translated from the Greek word *“oikodespotes”* which can also be translated as the master or head of a house or family. Therefore, the scribe being like **“a householder”**, was a parable for a scribe who would be a master in the knowledge of the ancient Holy Scriptures and Jesus' teachings too. Jesus continued **“who brings out of his treasure new and old things”**. The **“treasure”** is this knowledge that he has, the **“new”** things are the teachings of Jesus, and the **“old things”** are the teachings of the ancient Holy Scriptures. Therefore, when this scribe **“brings out his treasure”**, he is sharing his knowledge of both new and old teachings with others. Just before Jesus told this last parable to His disciples, He asked them if they had understood the meaning of the other parables. They responded to Him that they did. He then began the parable of the Scribe with the term **“Therefore”**, and it is important to recognize the context of why Jesus said that. He was saying that, because, if they understood the other parables, then as disciples of Jesus, this final parable applied to them.

4) Finally, Jesus said **“A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country.”** These wise words of Jesus reveal that He understood that the people who had previously known Him, while He was growing up, would not believe in Him. Therefore, Jesus did not perform many miracles in that area, since, the local people who remembered Him would not accept Him for the divine person that He really was.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The parables of the treasure and the pearl reveal that there is nothing more precious than the Kingdom of Heaven. This becomes clear as we grow in our faith and understanding of Jesus' teachings and the knowledge of God. In the same way that the individuals in these parables sold everything else they had, once they found their treasure; as we grow in our faith, we too can find that putting value on the things of this world becomes meaningless, in comparison to the treasure of the Kingdom of Heaven, when holding on to them would mean losing our place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

2) Jesus meant that the parable of the **“scribe who has been made a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven”** who **“brings out of his treasure new and old things”** applied to His disciples. In the same way, this teaching applies to followers of Jesus'

teachings today. It is important to not only understand and follow Jesus' teachings, but also to understand the ancient Holy Scriptures as well. The majority of these ancient Holy Scriptures can be found combined into a single Book known as the Old Testament.

4) Jesus understood that the locals from his childhood would not accept Him for who He was, because they only remembered him as the son of a local carpenter. In the same way, we may have lived a different life in the past, and later changed our ways to become people of faith. Because of our past, often our new life of faith may be questioned, or even rejected by people familiar with our past history. Just as Jesus accepted this reality in His time, we too can accept that this is just how things often are.

5) Jesus' explanation of these parables, and all that He has taught, provides us with hidden teachings about the Kingdom of God that were never available before. Jesus will continue to reveal and teach hidden truths about the Kingdom of Heaven in future Chapters.

# John The Baptist is Killed - Jesus Feeds Five Thousand

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 14, Verses 1-21

1 At that time, Herod the tetrarch heard the report concerning Jesus, 2 and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptizer. He is risen from the dead. That is why these powers work in him." 3 For Herod had arrested John, and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. 4 For John said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." 5 When he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. 6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced among them and pleased Herod.

7 Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she should ask. 8 She, being prompted by her mother, said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptizer."

9 The king was grieved, but for the sake of his oaths, and of those who sat at the table with him, he commanded it to be given, 10 and he sent and beheaded John in the prison. 11 His head was brought on a platter, and given to the young lady; and she brought it to her mother. 12 His disciples came, and took the body, and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus. 13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat, to a deserted place apart. When the multitudes heard it, they followed him on foot from the cities.

14 Jesus went out, and he saw a great multitude. He had compassion on them, and healed their sick. 15 When evening had come, his disciples came to him, saying, "This place is deserted, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves food." 16 But Jesus said to them, "**They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat.**" 17 They told him, "We only have here five loaves and two fish."

18 He said, "**Bring them here to me.**" 19 He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass; and he took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave to the multitudes. 20 They all ate, and were filled. They took up twelve baskets full of that which remained left over from the broken pieces. 21 Those who ate were about five thousand men, in addition to women and children.

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 14, Verses 1-21

1) John the Baptist openly accused King Herod of having a sinful relationship with his brother's wife Herodias, and as a result, Herod put John into prison. It is written that he would have put John to death but did not because he knew the people considered John to be a prophet, and he was afraid that they would react if he killed John. On the King's birthday, the daughter of Herodias pleased the King with a dance, and in reward, King Herod promised her anything that she asked for. In a bizarre twist, she was encouraged by her mother to ask the King to kill John and give

her his head on a platter. Herod fulfilled his promise by ordering John beheaded. John's imprisonment and execution were the result of the pride of both King Herod and Herodias, who were offended by John's accusations. They were willing to go as far as murdering him in reaction to John revealing the truth about their relationship.

2) The feeding of more than 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish was a miraculous event that is recorded in four ancient Books. These are the Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke & John. These four ancient Books are specifically about the history of Jesus' life and they document many miracles that He performed. This particular miracle is very important because it was performed in the presence of about five thousand men, plus women and children, who all became eye witnesses to the miracle. In addition to that fact, there are two other significant points to reflect upon: I) When the disciples suggested that Jesus send the people away to find food, He replied **"They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat."** In all four Books, Jesus is recorded as either looking to Heaven and blessing the bread and fish, or giving thanks to God for them, before they are transformed into enough food for everyone. Through giving thanks and blessings first, Jesus was demonstrating to His disciples that this miracle would come through God. And, by telling His disciples that they will **"give them something to eat"**, and then having them distribute the food, Jesus physically involved them in the miracle. II) In saying that the disciples would be the ones to **"give them something to eat"**, Jesus was also speaking prophetically about the future of His disciples, which they may not have understood at the time. The feeding of the five thousand was an opportunity for the disciples to witness and participate in the power of God at that moment. However, we will reflect in later Chapters that the disciples would eventually feed people spiritually by sharing Jesus' teachings and the knowledge of God, which is the true bread from Heaven.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) John proclaimed the message that people should sincerely repent of their sins, and he called out the sinful nature of the relationship between King Herod and Herodias. From the circumstances of John's death, we can observe two things: I) People may elect to ignore their own sins and refuse to repent, even after others have made them aware of them. II) Pressure from others can cause people to commit the greatest of sins, even if they do not intentionally wish to commit them.

2) After Jesus told the disciples **"You give them something to eat"**, they responded with **"We only have here five loaves and two fish"**, Jesus then replied **"Bring them here to me."** He looked to Heaven, blessed the food, and then performed the miracle. Through this miracle, Jesus provided an example of how circumstances may sometimes appear impossible. However, through faith and turning to God for help, all things are possible. Later in Chapter 19, Jesus will teach His disciples, saying **"with God all things are possible."**

# Jesus and Peter Walk on Water

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 14, Verses 22-36

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat, and to go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. 23 After he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into the mountain by himself to pray. When evening had come, he was there alone. 24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, distressed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. 25 In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came to them, walking on the sea. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It's a ghost!" and they cried out for fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "**Cheer up! It is I! Don't be afraid.**" 28 Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the waters." 29 He said, "**Come!**" Peter stepped down from the boat, and walked on the waters to come to Jesus. 30 But when he saw that the wind was strong, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, "**You of little faith, why did you doubt?**" 32 When they got up into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 Those who were in the boat came and worshiped him, saying, "You are truly the Son of God!" 34 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret. 35 When the people of that place recognized him, they sent into all that surrounding region, and brought to him all who were sick; 36 and they begged him that they might just touch the fringe of his garment. As many as touched it were made whole.

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 14, Verses 22-36

1) In Verse 25 it is written that "**Jesus came to them, walking, on the sea.**" In the ancient Book of Job, Chapter 9, Job describes the greatness of God and in Verse 8 of that Chapter he wrote: "**He alone stretches out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea.**" Therefore, this ancient Scripture revealed that Jesus' ability to walk on the sea was made possible through God.

2) Peter asked Jesus "**Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the waters**", and Jesus then told Peter to get out of the boat, saying "**Come**" to walk on the water too. This event was an opportunity for Jesus to help Peter strengthen his faith, and to strengthen the faith of the other disciples too by their witnessing this event.

3) By performing this miracle, Peter physically demonstrated that the disciples were also able to perform incredible miracles through faith.

4) Although Peter was able to walk on the water at first, he soon became distracted by the strong wind, became afraid and started to sink. He then cried out to Jesus to save Him from drowning. Jesus immediately responded by stretching out His hand to took hold of Peter. But He then said "**You of little faith, why did you doubt?**"

From this experience, a few things are revealed: I) It was through Peter's initial faith that he was able to walk on water. II) It was through his loss of faith, because of fear, that Peter began to sink. III) When Peter cried out to Jesus for help, He immediately took hold of him and saved him. IV) Finally, Jesus pointed out to Peter that he began to sink because he had not relied on his faith completely.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The miracle that Jesus performed of walking on the sea, and then calling Peter out of the boat to walk on the water with Him, revealed that all things are possible by having complete faith in God and Jesus.

#### ***The following is provided as a supporting side note:***

In the early days when the followers of Jesus were beginning to share and spread Jesus' teachings, there lived a man named Saul who persecuted them and imprisoned many who believed in Jesus. While on his way toward a city named Damascus, to find and imprison more of Jesus' followers, Jesus appeared to Saul and asked him "**why do you persecute me?**" Jesus then caused Saul's eyes to be blinded for three days. While Saul was blind in Damascus, a follower of Jesus named Ananias had a vision from God. God told Ananias to go to Saul and lay his hands on him in order to restore Saul's sight. Ananias was afraid to go because he knew that Saul was in Damascus for the sole purpose of capturing and imprisoning Jesus' followers. God then told Ananias "**Go your way, for he is my chosen vessel to bear my name before the nations and kings, and the children of Israel.**" Ananias went and met with Saul, touched him, and immediately Saul's eyes were no longer blind. From that point on, Saul became a dedicated follower of Jesus. Saul later became known as Paul, and just as was foretold to Ananias by God, Paul did become God's primary vessel or instrument for spreading God's Word. He traveled to many foreign countries, sharing the message and teachings of Jesus. Paul himself also performed many miracles in God's name. The majority of Books that are found in a collection of ancient Scriptures, called the "New Testament", were actually written by Paul himself. These Books were letters of instruction and encouragement to the early followers of Jesus, and these Books are very important to read for anyone who is faithfully seeking God today. In the ancient Book of Philippians, Chapter 4, Verse 13, Paul wrote the following: "**I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.**" This Verse summarizes the event of Peter walking on water and provides a confirmation that the power of God can be a real and working force in people's lives, when they put their faith in Jesus.

2) When Peter became afraid and started sinking he cried out to Jesus saying "**Lord, save me**", and it is written that Jesus immediately stretched out his hand and took hold of him. From this we can find comfort in knowing that in times of challenges and trouble, God is there to immediately respond to us as well, when we call upon Him for help; His only requirement is that we have complete faith in Him to do so.

3) From Peter's experience, we have been given a clear example of the power of faith and how through faith, all things are possible. His beginning to sink when his faith started to weaken reveals that only through unwavering faith and complete confidence in God can we overcome our fears and allow His miracles to happen.



# Honor and Commandments

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 15, Verses 1-9

1 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Why do your disciples disobey the tradition of the elders? For they don't wash their hands when they eat bread."

3 He answered them, "**Why do you also disobey the commandment of God because of your tradition? 4 For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother, and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.'** 5 But you say, 'Whoever may tell his father or his mother, "Whatever help you might otherwise have gotten from me is a gift devoted to God," 6 he shall not honor his father or mother.' You have made the commandment of God void because of your tradition. 7 You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 8 'These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. 9 And in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine rules made by men.'

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 15, Verses 1-9

1) Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees and scribes and questioned why His disciples disobeyed "**the tradition of the elders**" by not washing their hands before eating. This accusation appeared as though the disciples were disobeying the commandments of God by doing this. In fact, the washing of hands before eating was a tradition created by religious leaders, here referred to as "**the elders**", based on a commandment that God had given Moses, specifically concerning priests. This particular commandment can be found in the ancient Book of Exodus, 30, Verses 17-21. The actual Scripture is written "**Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, You shall also make a basin of brass, and its base of brass, in which to wash. You shall put it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it. Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in it. When they go into the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water, that they not die; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to Yahweh. So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they not die: and it shall be a statute forever to them, even to him and to his descendants throughout their generations.**" Moses and his brother Aaron were descendants from the Israelite tribe of Levi, also known as the Levites. God had instructed Moses that Aaron and his sons, and all the generations of Levites after them, were to become the priests for the Israelite people. This commandment regarding washing applied specifically to priests concerning preparation before entering into the "**Tent of Meeting**" and approaching "**the altar**." It had nothing to do with washing hands before eating. Therefore, it was the religious leaders themselves who later created this tradition of hand washing, and it was not a commandment given by God.

2) Jesus responded to the question of the Pharisees and scribes by asking them a question, saying "**Why do you also disobey the commandment of God because of**

**your tradition.**" Jesus then quoted an actual commandment given by God that they were disobeying, which was to "**Honor your father and your mother.**" This commandment can be found in the ancient Book of Exodus, Chapter 20, Verse 12 and again in the ancient Book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 5, Verse 16. Jesus then revealed how they were dishonoring their parents, in that, as religious leaders they were saying to people: "**Whoever may tell his father or his mother, "Whatever help you might otherwise have gotten from me is a gift devoted to God.**" This can be explained as follows: The religious leaders used the word "corban" to describe "gifts devoted to God." Gifts devoted to God and gifts toward the temple, could include anything, such as: Goods, money, food, services, etc... These "gifts" would then become identified by the religious leaders as being "corban", and once dedicated, they could not be used for any purpose other than temple related use. With His statement, Jesus was accusing the Pharisees and scribes of encouraging people to offer "corban" gifts, rather than encouraging them to help their parents who may be in need; and in doing so, they would be excused from helping their parents. Next, Jesus said "**You have made the commandment of God void because of your tradition.**" Jesus was pointing out that by encouraging "corban gifts" they were placing their tradition higher than the commandment of God. These men were the teachers of God's commandments to the people, and yet, they themselves were not abiding by God's commandments.

3) In both cases, by accusing the disciples for not following their tradition of hand washing, and by encouraging people to offer corban gifts instead of helping parents, the Pharisees and scribes were revealing their true nature. Jesus then called them "**hypocrites**" because these religious leaders were devoted to traditions that were not based on God's commandments, and at the same time they were breaking God's commandments.

4) Jesus referred to the behavior of these religious men as fulfilling a prophecy written by Isaiah, which He then quoted. This prophecy can be found in the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 29, Verse 13, and it is written as follows: "**The Lord said, "Because this people draws near with their mouth and honors me with their lips, but they have removed their heart far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men which has been taught.**" Jesus quoted this Verse from this prophecy as describing the Pharisees' and scribes' actions. However, the actual text of Verse 13 begins with: "**The Lord said, 'Because this people....**" Since this sentence of the prophecy begins with "**Because this people...**", it must then lead into the next sentence of the prophecy, which is Verse 14. Verse 14 concludes the prophecy as follows: "**therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men will perish, and the understanding of their prudent men will be hidden.**" This Verse of Isaiah's prophecy predicted that Jesus would be the response to the actions of the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus was performing marvelous works and wonders of God among them, and He also exposed their lies behind the false "**wisdom**" that they were using to manipulate people.

## **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The accusation that Jesus made against the Pharisees and scribes, about not showing honor to fathers and mothers, provides us with one of God's commandments. God commanded that people honor their parents, and Jesus further indicated that this includes helping them during their time of need.

2) Isaiah's prophecy, fulfilled by the Pharisees and scribes and revealed by Jesus, teaches that God rejects people who only worship and honor Him with their mouths, but have hearts that are far from Him. This means that when worshipping and honoring God, our actions and prayers are to be sincere and honestly delivered from the heart, in order to be acceptable to God.

# Hearts, Faith and Jesus Feeds Four Thousand

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 15, Verses 10-39

10 He summoned the multitude, and said to them, "**Hear, and understand. 11 That which enters into the mouth doesn't defile the man; but that which proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.**" 12 Then the disciples came, and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" 13 But he answered, "**Every plant which my heavenly Father didn't plant will be uprooted. 14 Leave them alone. They are blind guides of the blind. If the blind guide the blind, both will fall into a pit.**" 15 Peter answered him, "Explain the parable to us." 16 So Jesus said, "**Do you also still not understand? 17 Don't you understand that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the belly, and then out of the body? 18 But the things which proceed out of the mouth come out of the heart, and they defile the man. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies. 20 These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands doesn't defile the man.**"

21 Jesus went out from there, and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 Behold, a Canaanite woman came out from those borders, and cried, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, you son of David! My daughter is severely possessed by a demon!" 23 But he answered her not a word. His disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away; for she cries after us." 24 But he answered, "**I wasn't sent to anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**" 25 But she came and worshiped him, saying, "Lord, help me." 26 But he answered, "**It is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.**" 27 But she said, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered her, "**Woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you even as you desire.**" And her daughter was healed from that hour.

29 Jesus departed from there, and came near to the sea of Galilee; and he went up into the mountain, and sat there. 30 Great multitudes came to him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others, and they put them down at his feet. He healed them, 31 so that the multitude wondered when they saw the mute speaking, the injured healed, the lame walking, and the blind seeing—and they glorified the God of Israel. 32 Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "**I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days and have nothing to eat. I don't want to send them away fasting, or they might faint on the way.**" 33 The disciples said to him, "Where should we get so many loaves in a deserted place as to satisfy so great a multitude?" 34 Jesus said to them, "**How many loaves do you have?**" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." 35 He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground; 36 and he took the seven loaves and the fish. He gave thanks and broke them, and gave to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. 37 They all ate, and were filled. They took up seven

baskets full of the broken pieces that were left over. 38 Those who ate were four thousand men, in addition to women and children. 39 Then he sent away the multitudes, got into the boat, and came into the borders of Magdala.

### **Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 15, Verses 10-39**

1) We've reflected in earlier Chapters how the knowledge of God begins like a seed planted into an open and receiving heart. We've also reflected that God's truth is rejected by many, even after they've seen God working or heard God's Word. When the disciples asked Jesus if He knew that He had offended the Pharisees, Jesus responded, saying "**Every plant which my heavenly Father didn't plant will be uprooted.**" Jesus was stating that the Pharisees were people who did not have the seed of God planted within them, and His reference to those plants being uprooted was another reference to the time of judgement. The Pharisees did not accept Jesus or believe in His teachings. Therefore, Jesus was also predicting that they would be rejected by God, even though they were the religious leaders of the time.

2) Jesus compared the Pharisees to blind men, because they were unable to see that Jesus was revealing the knowledge of God through His teachings and the miracles He was performing.

3) Jesus said the Pharisees were "**blind guides of the blind**". The Pharisees were the "**blind guides**" and "**the blind**" were their followers. Jesus was revealing new truths about God and Heaven and they rejected His teachings. The Pharisees were therefore denying themselves and their followers these divine teachings and stubbornly blinding themselves from these truths. As a result, Jesus said they "**both will fall into a pit**", meaning that in the end, the fate of both the Pharisees and their followers would be disastrous.

4) When Peter asked Jesus to explain the parable, Jesus revealed that what dishonors people before God is the thoughts and actions that proceed from a person's heart not that which enters the body through their mouth. Jesus said "**the things which proceed out of the mouth come out of the heart, and they defile the man**", meaning that what people say can also dishonor them. Jesus then further explained that evil thoughts begin within a person's heart, which then leads them into committing all forms of sinful acts.

5) Tyre and Sidon were non-Israelite cities where people worshipped pagan gods. When a Canaanite woman from that area approached Jesus to heal her daughter, Jesus ignored her at first. When the disciples asked Him to send her away, His response was "**I wasn't sent to anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**" This comment was to emphasize that Jesus' primary mission was to reveal the knowledge of God, through His teachings, to the people of Israel, and this woman was not an Israelite.

6) Next it is written that the Canaanite woman "**came and worshiped Him, saying, Lord help me.**" This is a key point because although she was not an Israelite, and was asking Jesus to heal her daughter, she was also worshipping Him. Jesus response was, "**It is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.**" Jesus' reply to the woman appears to be harsh, however, if we refer back to Chapter 7, we can find another instance when Jesus compared people with "dogs". In that Chapter Jesus said "**Don't give that which is holy to the dogs**", and it was reflected that "**the dogs**" referred to people who reject Jesus' teachings, God's Word and do not live according to Gods will. The Canaanite people worshiped multiple pagan gods; whereas the Israelites believed in one God, and they considered themselves to be "the children of God." Therefore, with His reply to the Canaanite woman, Jesus was making a distinction between the Israelites (the children), and those who worshipped multiple pagan gods (the dogs). The woman's response showed that she understood what Jesus meant, but she demonstrated her humility and great faith in who Jesus was, by replying "**Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table.**" This statement confirmed that she had faith and believed in Jesus, and He responded to her by saying "**Woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you even as you desire**", and the woman's child was healed that hour.

7) Next, it is recorded that Jesus returned to an area near the sea of Galilee, where He continued to heal a multitude of people. The text notes that the crowd "**wondered**" at the miracles He performed, and they "**glorified the God of Israel.**" Jesus must have emphasized that His miracles were the work of God, being performed through Him, because it was God that they glorified rather than Jesus.

8) Finally, it is written that Jesus said "**I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days and have nothing to eat. I don't want to send them away fasting, or they might faint on the way.**" By this we can assume that Jesus was not only healing people, but He must have been teaching them too, because they did not want to leave Him for three days, even though they had nothing to eat. Another important point to note is that Jesus said "**I don't want to send them away fasting.**" It was reflected in Chapter 6, that fasting is a form of self-denial to focus on worshipping God. As in the previous Chapter, Jesus again gave thanks to God, and then miraculously provided enough food for the disciples to distribute to over 4000 people. The difference between the previous Chapter's feeding of over 5000 thousand people, and this Chapter's miracle was that: In this Chapter, it is written that the multitudes had been with Jesus for three days, worshiping and glorifying God and His miracles. This meant that their faith in God was developing and growing. Jesus' comment, "**I don't want to send them away fasting, or they might faint on the way**", is significant because it can also represent the fading of their faith '**on the way**' of their spiritual journey. Jesus therefore, fed them for physical strength and provided this amazing miracle to further strengthen their spiritual faith, before they left Him.

## **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus taught that our own hearts can deceive us, leading to our defilement before God. At such times, relying on God's strength can help us overcome the internal desires that can lead us into temptation and sinful acts.

2) Jesus told His disciples that His primary mission was to reveal the knowledge of God to the Israelite people. However, Jesus' teachings reveal that the knowledge of God is available to everyone who has faith and belief in Him; and His healing of the non-Israelite woman's daughter, who showed her great faith in Jesus, proved that to be true.

3) The Canaanite woman provides a wonderful example of great and constant faith. Her experience reveals that through constant faith and belief, God will participate in our lives. From this, we can see that prayer made in faith is very powerful and acceptable to God, and if God does not respond at first, then it may be that we need to deepen our faith in Him. We'll reflect more about deepening our faith in later Chapters.

4) The miracle of feeding 4000 people who were learning and growing their faith in God through Jesus, even though they had nothing to eat for three days, is a powerful example of how God provides for those whose faith endures, even through difficult circumstances.



# Signs and Warnings

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 16, Verses 1-12

1 The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing him, asked him to show them a sign from heaven. 2 But he answered them, "**When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.'** 3 **In the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.'** Hypocrites! You know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but you can't discern the signs of the times! 4 **An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and there will be no sign given to it, except the sign of the prophet Jonah.**" He left them, and departed.

5 The disciples came to the other side and had forgotten to take bread. 6 Jesus said to them, "**Take heed and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**" 7 They reasoned among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread." 8 Jesus, perceiving it, said, "**Why do you reason among yourselves, you of little faith, 'because you have brought no bread?'** 9 **Don't you yet perceive, neither remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up? 10 Nor the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you took up? 11 How is it that you don't perceive that I didn't speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**" 12 Then they understood that he didn't tell them to beware of the yeast of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 16, Verses 1-12

1) This Chapter begins with the Pharisees and Sadducees once again asking Jesus to "**show them a sign from Heaven.**" This time Jesus called them "**hypocrites**" for making their request. He pointed out that by relying on their senses, they were able to predict the weather, based on the appearance of the sky, and yet they were unwilling to recognize "**the signs of the times**" happening right in front of them. The signs that they were unable to recognize included: I) Who Jesus really was, after having witnessed His miracles and heard His teachings II) The evil and adulterous nature of the people surrounding them, with whom they lived amongst and did not speak out against.

2) Once again, Jesus told the Pharisees and Sadducees to refer to the ancient prophet Jonah for their sign. Chapter 12 records that Jesus gave the same response to the Pharisees and scribes when they asked Him for a sign, and it was also revealed who Jonah was in that Chapter. To recap the reflections on Jonah from Chapter 12: I) Jonah was a prophet, that God had instructed to preach to the sinful people of Nineveh, who then repented of their evil ways and turned back to God after hearing Jonah preach. Jesus compared Himself to Jonah saying "**someone greater than Jonah is here**" preaching directly to them. II) Jesus pointed out that Jonah had spent three days and three nights in the belly of a whale, and used that as a comparison to Himself when He said "**For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three**



**nights in the heart of the earth.**" We will reflect more about this prediction from Jesus in later Chapters, and how it comes true.

3) Next, Jesus warns His disciples to **"Take heed and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."** At first, the disciples were confused by what Jesus meant, thinking that He was actually speaking about bread. In Chapter 13, Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven to yeast. Like yeast, which makes bread rise, the knowledge of God begins as a small instrument of change within the human heart, and then grows to spiritually transform a person, as the teachings of Jesus and God's Word are followed. Here in this Chapter, Jesus explained that the Pharisees' and Sadducees' yeast represented their false teachings, which could become a negative instrument of change within to grow and influence the disciples too. Before explaining that though, Jesus began by saying **"Why do you reason among yourselves, you of little faith"**, to remind them that their faith in His teachings' was not yet strong enough. Therefore, Jesus was warning them to beware of false teachings but also telling them to strengthen their faith in the truth of what Jesus was teaching them too. It was necessary for Jesus to reveal this to His disciples because: I) Jesus was teaching God's truth to them, and they had to be made aware of and not led astray by the false teachings of others II) The disciples would become key figures who would later spread Jesus' teachings, and so He needed to be clear that the disciples must be teaching what He taught them and pass on Jesus' teaching in their pure form.

4) Jesus wanted His disciples' faith to be strongly rooted in His teachings alone, and he reminded them of the two occasions when thousands had gathered to hear Him teach, and how through the miracles of God, Jesus was able to feed everyone. Jesus performed those miracles and the disciples physically distributed the food to everyone. Jesus now referred to those particular miracles when he was warning them about false teachings, to emphasize that His teachings are the true "bread from Heaven" that His disciples needed to have faith in, and then teach to others.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Once again, Jesus refused to perform "a sign" for the Pharisees and Sadducees when they asked Him to. This response revealed that when people have already been provided with more than enough proof of God's truth, and still choose not to believe and accept His truth, then they must not expect God to continually provide miracles to overcome their unbelief.

2) Not everyone who professes to be teaching God's truth is actually teaching the truth. The ancient scriptures of God's Word and the teachings of Jesus provide us with references that we can use to compare against and determine whether or not someone is actually teaching God's truth.

# Jesus The Christ is Son of God

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 16, Verses 13-20

13 Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, "**Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?**" 14 They said, "Some say John the Baptizer, some, Elijah, and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "**But who do you say that I am?**" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus answered him, "**Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19 I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven.**" 20 Then he commanded the disciples that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ.

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 16, Verses 13-20

1) Jesus asked His disciples "**Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?**" They responded by telling Jesus what they've heard other people say about Him. He then asked them directly "**But who do you say that I am?**" It was Peter who responded, and answered "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" Jesus' response to Peter provides the following very significant points to be reflected upon:

I) Jesus immediately said, "**Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven.**" In Chapter 4, it was recorded that Jesus called Simon "Peter", and He continued to refer to him as Peter in the Chapters that have followed since. Here, Jesus referred to his given name "Simon", and combined it with "Bar Jonah." The word "bar", is the Aramaic word for "son", and so "Bar Jonah" means "Son of Jonah." We've reflected how Jonah was a prophet who preached to the sinful people of Ninevah, and because of Jonah's preaching, they all turned away from their sins and returned to God. However, in the Book of Jonah it is also written that it was God who spoke to Jonah and told him to go to Ninevah to preach. Therefore, by calling Simon the "Son of Jonah", Jesus compared Simon to Jonah and then explained that it was God who had revealed to Simon who Jesus really was; just as God had instructed Jonah to go to Ninevah to preach.

II) Jesus then went on to say, "**I also tell you that you are Peter.**" The name "Peter" means "rock", however, in the original Greek text, "Peter" was written as "Petros", which means a detached stone that comes from a solid mass of rock. Jesus then continued to say, "**and on this rock, I will build my assembly**". (The term "**my assembly**" refers to people who become faithful followers of Jesus' teachings). In the original Greek text for this part of the sentence though, "**rock**" was written as "petras" which actually means "a solid mass of rock." Therefore, if we compare "Petros" (stone) with petras (solid mass of rock) we can see that Jesus had made a very subtle, yet distinct separation between Peter the "stone" and this "rock", that

Jesus will build His assembly upon. In the ancient Scriptures there are many places where God is referred to as "rock." A few examples include: i) In the Book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 32, Verses 3-4, it is written **"For I will proclaim Yahweh's name. Ascribe greatness to our God. The Rock, his work is perfect, for all His ways are just."** ii) In the Book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, Chapter 22, Verse 47, it is written **"Yahweh lives! Blessed be my Rock! Exalted be God the Rock of my salvation."** iii) In the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 26, Verse 4, it is written **"Trust in Yahweh forever, for in Yah, Yahweh, is an everlasting Rock."** Therefore, if we consider these details together, we can interpret Jesus' message to Peter. First, Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter, which represents a transformation, in the same way that a new follower of Jesus transforms into a new person of faith in God. Giving Simon a new name, confirmed his spiritual transformation into a new person of faith. Secondly, because of Peter's faith, he accepted what God had revealed to him, and knew who Jesus was. Therefore, it is through faith, that God communicates and works through people. Thirdly, Peter was compared to a stone that comes from a larger mass of rock (which was a reference to God), meaning that he was one of God's people. And finally, Jesus pointed toward the faith of Peter as being the means by which He would build and grow His assembly of people, all of whom would be set on **"this rock"**, which is God.

III) Next, Jesus went on to say **"and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."** "The gates" suggest the ability to contain or hold something or someone. The term "hades" is a Greek word, and when translated into Hebrew (the language of the ancient Scriptures) it becomes "sheol." Both hades and sheol when translated into English refer to death. We can find many passages in the ancient Scriptures about "sheol", where it is described as a final place of death, and a hopeless place without God. For example, in the Book of Psalms, Chapter 88, Verses 3-5, it is written **"For my soul is full of troubles. My life draws near to Sheol. I am counted among those who go down into the pit. I am like a man who has no help, set apart among the dead."** In the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 5, Verses 12-14, this passage about sheol is written regarding those who have turned away from God, as follows **"The harp, lyre, tambourine, and flute, with wine, are at their feasts; but they don't respect the work of Yahweh, neither have they considered the operation of his hands. Therefore my people go into captivity for lack of knowledge. Their honorable men are famished, and their multitudes are parched with thirst. Therefore Sheol has enlarged its desire, and opened its mouth without measure; and their glory, their multitude, their pomp, and he who rejoices among them, descend into it."** This statement of Jesus that **"the gates of Hades will not prevail against it"**, then meant that "the gates of death" will not conquer or contain the assembly of His people. We will reflect more about this comment of Jesus in later Chapters.

IV) Then, Jesus said **"I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven"**, which revealed that it is through Jesus that the assembly of His people will be given access to Heaven.

V) Finally, Jesus said **"and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in Heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in Heaven."** Since this statement follows Jesus' promise to provide His assembly with

access to Heaven, and it begins with the word "and", then this section continues and extends the promise and connection with Jesus. Therefore, it can be interpreted that God's will in Heaven is done on earth through those who have faith and believe in Jesus. And so, whatever the people of His assembly can bring together in Jesus' name, will have already been "**bound in Heaven**", and whatever the people of His assembly let go of in Jesus name, will have already been "**released in Heaven**" as well; and all these things will be revealed to the people of His assembly through their faith.

2) Jesus commanded "**the disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.**" In the "Historical Background" section of this book, it was reflected that the Israelite people had long awaited for "the Christ" (the Messiah, the Anointed One), to come and lead their people. Therefore, Jesus did not want His disciples to promote that He was "the Christ" at that particular moment in time, because it would have confused people who had been expecting the arrival of their "earthly" leader, which did not align with Jesus' true mission. We will reflect on Jesus' true mission in later Chapters.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Peter had faith and believed that Jesus was "**the Christ, the Son of the living God**", and Jesus explained that this knowledge was revealed to him by "**my Father who is in Heaven.**" This provides us with an example of how God reveals special knowledge to those who put their faith and trust in Jesus, a knowledge that is often hidden from others.

2) When Jesus said "**I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven**", He was not only referring to Peter alone, but to the whole assembly of His people. Therefore, a place is reserved in Heaven for those who follow Jesus' teachings and live according to God's will.

3) Jesus taught that God's work on earth will be revealed to and carried out through the people of Jesus' assembly. In other words, God's will is revealed to those who have faith and follow Jesus' teachings. Therefore, by studying Jesus' teachings we too can be part of His assembly and have God's will be done on earth through us.

# Deny Thyself and Follow Jesus

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 16, Verses 21-27

21 From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up. 22 Peter took him aside, and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This will never be done to you." 23 But he turned, and said to Peter, "**Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men.**" 24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "**If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life? 27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds.**"

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 16, Verses 21-27

1) This next section begins with "**From that time, Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up.**" This must have been both surprising and confusing for the disciples because: I) This prediction was ironic since Jesus' teachings were all about God and Heaven, and yet it was the religious leaders themselves who Jesus was predicting would be the cause of His suffering and death. II) He showed His disciples that He "**must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things.**" The word "**must**" implied that His future suffering and death was necessary, and that Jesus accepted it. We will reflect why it was necessary for Jesus to go through these things in later Chapters. III) Finally, He revealed that He would be killed, but then on "**the third day be raised up**" after He was dead. With these final words, Jesus revealed what He meant, back in Chapter 12 when He compared Himself to Jonah, saying "**For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.**" We will reflect more about this upcoming event in later Chapters.

2) When Jesus revealed that he would be killed in Jerusalem, Peter took Him aside and said, "**This will never be done to you.**" Jesus response was "**Get behind me, Satan!**" This reaction may seem harsh. However, the word "Satan" is a Hebrew word, and when translated it means "adversary", or one who obstructs or opposes someone. In the ancient Book of Job, we can read about a man named Job who was "**blameless and upright, and one who feared God, and turned away from evil**", and that "**there was no one like him in the earth.**" In this book, we can read that Job's faith in God was tested by someone referred to as "Satan." It is written that Satan approached God and suggested that Job's faith would not stand if he were

tested, and that Job would turn away from God as a result. God agreed to Satan testing Job's faith by allowing Satan to bring a series of great tragedies into Job's life. In the end, Job's faith remained strong, and God restored everything that Job had lost, by twice as much as he originally had.

In Chapter 4, when Jesus was being tempted in the wilderness by the devil, we read that Jesus also said to the devil "**Get behind me, Satan!**" Therefore, in calling Peter "Satan", Jesus was accusing Peter of opposing Him.

3) Next, Jesus explained the reason why Peter's comment was opposing Him, saying "**You are a stumbling block to me.**" As we've previously reflected, Jesus used the term "stumble" to refer to things or people that lead away from faith in God. In this case, Peter's words, if followed, would have led Jesus away from God's plan for Him. Jesus confirmed this by saying; "**for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men.**" Here Jesus was revealing to Peter that his words were opposing God's will, because Peter's intentions were based on preserving Jesus' life on earth, rather than supporting God's true plan for Jesus. It must also be reflected that Jesus didn't speak harshly to Peter to insult him. Instead, He needed to convince Peter that He had to die, and that Peter had to allow this to happen. We'll reflect more about God's true plan for Jesus in future Chapters.

4) Jesus then shared similar teachings with His disciples to those that He had already taught back in Chapter 10. Although the words found here are slightly different, the meaning is the same. Jesus said to His disciples "**If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.**" By using the words "**take up his cross**" Jesus was painting a word picture of death and humiliation that would have been clearly understood by His disciples. Death by crucifixion on a cross was a common form of punishment, carried out by the Romans who ruled during Jesus' time. This form of execution was a way of not only killing but also humiliating a person too. In many cases, the victims were forced to carry their own cross to the place where they would be crucified. Jesus continued to explain what He meant by saying "**For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it.**" He used the cross as a symbolic reference to show that a life focused on the ways of this world leads to death, but that giving up the ways of this world and following after Jesus' teachings leads to an everlasting life, even though His followers may be rejected in this world and experience humiliation in the process.

5) Jesus said, "**For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his life.**" Here Jesus was reinforcing the temporary nature of a life focused on the things of this world. Jesus wanted His disciples to consider: What value can there be in accumulating worldly treasures while living in this world, if in the end, a person loses access to everlasting life?

6) Jesus continued "**Or what will a man give in exchange for his life?**" Again, Jesus was referring to "eternal life" and questioning what can a person offer to God in



exchange for access to eternal life? Which reveals that it is what people do and how they live in this life which determines their circumstance in the afterlife. When death finally comes, what can a person possibly give in exchange for receiving everlasting life?

7) Next, Jesus said "**For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels.**" Here Jesus was predicting that at some point in the future, after his death, He will return again, and His words "**in the glory of His Father with his angels**", can be interpreted as "on behalf of God and accompanied by His angels." Jesus continued "**and then He will render to everyone according to his deeds.**" The word "**render**" means "to give", the terms "**according to**" implies being given "in proportion to", and "**deeds**" can be interpreted as "actions" or "the manner in which a person conducts themselves." Therefore, this full sentence can be interpreted as follows: Jesus will one day return on behalf of God with His angels and will give to everyone in proportion to the manner in which they have conducted themselves. In a later Chapter the disciples will ask Jesus to explain this comment further, and so more detailed reflections about this comment will be provided in that Chapter.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) By using the cross to refer to giving up a life focused on this material world and following Jesus' teachings, it becomes clear that this way of life may be difficult and we may face rejection or even humiliation in doing so. That being said, the gift of receiving eternal life for following the path of Jesus' teachings would far outweigh any worldly comforts or treasures we can obtain in this world.

2) The words "**what will a man give in exchange for his life?**" is a key teaching for us to consider, because our future in the afterlife cannot be influenced after we die. Therefore, the deeper meaning behind these words are: It is what we do and how we live in this life which determines our circumstance in the afterlife, and it is through following Jesus' teachings in this life that we can obtain the reward of eternal life.

# Jesus is Transfigured

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 16, Verse 28

28 "**Most certainly I tell you, there are some standing here who will in no way taste of death, until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.**"

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 17, Verses 1-9

1 After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them up into a high mountain by themselves. 2 He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as the light. 3 Behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them talking with him.

4 Peter answered, and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you want, let's make three tents here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them. Behold, a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."

6 When the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces, and were very afraid. 7 Jesus came and touched them and said, "**Get up, and don't be afraid.**" 8 Lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "**Don't tell anyone what you saw, until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.**"

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 16, Verse 28 And Chapter 17, Verses 1-9

*Here the reflections from Chapter 16, Verse 28, have been included together with the reflections from Chapter 17, Verses 1-8. Although these events have been separated into two Chapters in the Book of Matthew, in the ancient Books of Mark and Luke these events were recorded together in one single Chapter. Therefore, it appears that these events belong together and should be combined when reflecting upon Matthew's writing.*

1) In Matthew Chapter 16, Verse 28, Jesus is recorded as saying "**Most certainly I tell you, there are some standing here who will in no way taste of death, until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.**" In the ancient Book of Mark, this particular statement of Jesus is recorded as "**Most certainly I tell you, there are some standing here who will in no way taste death until they see God's Kingdom come with power.**" And in the Book of Luke, Jesus is recorded as saying "**There are some of those who stand here, who will in no way taste death, until they see God's Kingdom.**" Therefore, Jesus was speaking to His disciples and saying that a few of them standing with Him, would not die before they witness Him appearing in the Heavenly realm of God's Kingdom.

This statement of Jesus ends Matthew, Chapter 16 and we now move into Chapter 17, when six days later Jesus took Peter, James and John to a high mountain place, where it is written that Jesus "**was transfigured before them. His face shone like**



**the sun, and his garments became as white as light. Behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them talking with Him.**" In earlier Chapters, it has been reflected that Moses and Elijah were both very significant men of God. Jesus spoke about them and made several references to them from ancient Scriptures. It is now recorded that Jesus physically changed to shine like the sun, wearing garments as white as light, and that Moses and Elijah appeared talking with Him. The three disciples that were there, witnessed Jesus interacting with these two Holy men of God, who had died long before Jesus was born. Therefore, these disciples were witnessing Jesus interacting with these men from the Heavenly realm, which mirrors the promise Jesus made six days before, that some of His disciples would see Jesus in His Kingdom.

2) Peter was recorded as reacting to what he saw by saying to Jesus "**Lord it is good for us to be here. If you want, let's make 3 tents here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.**" Matthew does not provide any insight as to why Peter may have said this. However, if we refer to the two other Books that record this event, we can find: I) In the Book of Mark it is written that Peter said this because "**he didn't know what to say, for they were very afraid.**" II) In the Book of Luke, it is recorded that Peter said these words "**not knowing what he said.**" Therefore, it appears that his suggestion was an involuntary response to having witnessed this miraculous event.

3) The disciple's experience did not end there but continued when a bright cloud overshadowed them, and they heard God's voice saying, "**This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.**" In Chapter 15, it was reflected that God told Moses that all the generations of Levites were to become priests for the Israelite people forever. In the ancient Book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 18, Moses was speaking to the Levites and in Verse 15, it is written that Moses said to them "**Yahweh your God will raise up to you a prophet from among you, of your brothers, like me. You shall listen to him.**" In the "Historical Background" section of this book, we noted how God spoke to Moses and enabled him to lead God's people out of slavery and bondage into their promised land. These words of Moses in Deuteronomy predicted that God would one day provide a prophet of God, from among the Israelite people, who would be a leader like Moses, and that they should listen to Him. Therefore, Jesus' meeting with Moses and Elijah, and the voice of God telling the disciples to listen to Him, fulfilled that ancient prophecy of Moses in Deuteronomy.

4) After hearing God's voice, the disciples fell to their knees and placed their faces to the ground, to honor God in fear, but Jesus touched them and told them to get up and not to be afraid. As soon as they lifted up their eyes, Jesus was standing there alone. This was the event that Jesus predicted in Chapter 16, where He said that some of His disciples would "**see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.**" These three disciples did in fact witness Jesus coming in His Kingdom. They saw Him transform in front of them and meet with Moses and Elijah, and they heard God's voice.

5) Jesus then said to the three disciples "**Don't tell anyone what you saw, until the Son of Man has risen from the dead**", which Jesus had already told them was going to happen, in the previous Chapter. The experience these disciples had just shared would have convinced them that Jesus was the Son of God, and Jesus' statement might have helped to strengthen their acceptance of the fact that Jesus would be killed.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus' transfiguration, His meeting with Moses and Elijah, and God telling the disciples to "**Listen to him**", not only fulfilled Moses' ancient prophecy, but also revealed the true significance of who Jesus is and His mission. Like Moses, Jesus came to lead God's people. God Himself endorsed Jesus and advised His disciples to "**Listen to him**", therefore it would be wise to read, learn and practice all of what Jesus taught.

# Faith without Unbelief

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 17, Verses 10-21

10 His disciples asked him, saying, "Then why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 11 Jesus answered them, "**Elijah indeed comes first, and will restore all things, 12 but I tell you that Elijah has come already, and they didn't recognize him, but did to him whatever they wanted to. Even so the Son of Man will also suffer by them.**" 13 Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptizer.

14 When they came to the multitude, a man came to him, kneeling down to him, and saying, 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is epileptic, and suffers grievously; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. 16 So I brought him to your disciples, and they could not cure him." 17 Jesus answered, "**Faithless and perverse generation! How long will I be with you? How long will I bear with you? Bring him here to me.**" 18 Jesus rebuked him, the demon went out of him, and the boy was cured from that hour. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately, and said, "Why weren't we able to cast it out?" 20 He said to them, "**Because of your unbelief. For most certainly I tell you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. 21 But this kind doesn't go out except by prayer and fasting.**"

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 17, Verses 10-21

1) While descending from the mountain, the disciples asked Jesus "**Then why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?**" In Chapter 11, it was reflected who Elijah was, and that the prophet Malachi had predicted "**Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple.**" Then Malachi revealed "**Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes.**" The scribes would have referenced this prediction when they taught that Elijah must come first. The disciples had just witnessed Jesus' transfiguration, His meeting with Moses and Elijah, and heard the voice of God saying "**This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him**", and so they truly understood that Jesus was the Messiah (the anointed one) for whom the Israelites had long waited. They asked this question of Jesus because they were confused by the scribes saying Elijah's must come first, and yet Jesus was already with them. Jesus then reminded them that Elijah had already come, and the disciples remembered that Jesus had said Elijah had returned in the person of John the Baptist.

2) Upon their return from the mountain, there was a multitude of people waiting for Jesus. Among them was a man who asked Jesus to heal his son, who was epileptic and possessed by a demon. This man went on to say that Jesus' disciples were unable to heal him. Jesus responded aggressively, saying "**Faithless and perverse**

**generation!"** Jesus is indeed angry. However, these words Jesus said refer to the ancient Book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 32, Verses 18-21, where it is written, **"Of the Rock who became your father, you are unmindful and have forgotten God who gave you birth. Yahweh saw and abhorred, because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters. He said, "I will hide my face from them. I will see what their end will be; For they are a very perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God. They have provoked me to anger with their vanities."** This section of Scripture is about God expressing His anger with His people who have turned toward sin and away from their faith in Him. Jesus was comparing the multitude that He was facing with God's description of His people in ancient Scripture and feeling the same sense of anger because of their behavior.

*Side Note: We've reflected in previous Chapters that the knowledge of God is "hidden", and in these Verses of Deuteronomy from ancient Scripture, it is also written that God hid Himself from His people to see what they will do.*

3) Next, Jesus went on to say **"How long will I be with you? How long will I bear with you?"** These words of Jesus now expressed frustration. Even though Jesus had been teaching and healing people for some time, He realized that the people continued to live in their sinful and unfaithful ways. Here Jesus was not only speaking to the multitude, but also to His disciples. Jesus was saying: how much more must I do before you believe and have complete faith, and He was reminding them that He would not always be with them, and that their faith needed to get stronger.

4) Even still, Jesus had compassion for the boy and for his father, who did not lose faith in Jesus' ability to cure his son even when the disciples could not. In the ancient Book of Mark, this same event is also recorded. In Mark, Jesus said to the boy's father **"If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."** The father responded **"I believe. Help my unbelief"**, and then Jesus cast the demon out of the boy. Continuing in our reflections in Matthew, Jesus told His disciples privately that their **"unbelief"** was the reason why they could not perform this miracle. In Chapter 10, it is written that the disciples had been given **"authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every sickness."** Therefore, they had already been performing similar miracles before attempting to cure this boy. Jesus was pointing out that although they had some faith, it was still not complete faith, without unbelief.

5) On His point of unbelief, Jesus went on to further explain to His disciples, saying **"For most certainly I tell you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there.' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."** The type of faith that Jesus was referring to is "complete faith", which is faith that is supported by "complete belief." In this case, the demon was the "mountain" which the disciples could not overcome, due to their lack of "complete faith." Jesus also used this mountain reference to point toward an

ancient Scripture that proved His point. Written in the ancient book of Zechariah, Chapter 4, Verses 6-7, the prophet Zechariah wrote that God had spoken to him about a man named Zerubbabel, saying; **"Then he answered and spoke to me, saying, 'This is Yahweh's word to Zerubbabel, saying, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit,' says Yahweh of Armies. Who are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you are a plain; and he will bring out the capstone with shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'"** This scripture may require an explanation in order to fully understand why Jesus used this reference. In the "Historical Background" section of this book it was described that, over the course of history, the Israelite people had been conquered and became captives of other nations whenever their faith had turned away from God. At one point, they became captives of the Babylonians who destroyed their city of Jerusalem, including God's Holy temple. In the ancient Book of Ezra, information about this man named Zerubbabel is recorded. He led a group of captives out of Babylon to return to the destroyed city of Jerusalem, and Zerubbabel began rebuilding God's Holy temple. While rebuilding the temple, the governor in the area tried to stop its reconstruction. This opposition to reconstructing the temple was the **"great mountain"** referred to in Zechariah, and the Scripture states that **"Not by might, nor power, but by my spirit"**, would God turn that **"great mountain"** of resistance into a flat **"plain."** When the governor asked who gave them the authority to rebuild, they responded by simply saying **"We are the servants of the God of Heaven and earth and are building the house that was built these many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished."** The governor took this response to the ruling King, who then responded by giving them his permission to continue rebuilding. In addition to that, not only was Zerubbabel able to continue the reconstruction of the Holy temple, but the king also ordered that everything originally stolen from the temple be sent back from Babylon and returned to the temple.

The final piece of this scripture from Zechariah states **"and he will bring out the capstone with shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'"** The capstone was the final stone put in place to complete the temple. Therefore, it was through Zerubbabel's faith in God, and giving Him praise and honor, by declaring that God had given them the authority to rebuild, that God responded through His Spirit to overcome "the mountain" of resistance and enable Zerubbabel to continue rebuilding the temple to its' completion.

6) Finally, Jesus said **"But this kind doesn't go out except by prayer and fasting"** to teach His disciples that their faith was not yet mature enough to overcome the obstacle of this demon that possessed the child. Jesus was teaching His disciples that faith develops and matures into "complete faith" without "unbelief", through prayer and fasting. In Chapter 6, Jesus taught how to pray and how to fast, and revealed that God will openly reward those who do so according to Jesus' teachings. In Chapter 9, through the use of parables, Jesus revealed that the disciples were not yet ready to fast at that point. Now, however, Jesus was revealing to them, that in order for their faith to completely develop, beyond "unbelief", they must now begin to pray and fast in the way that He taught.

## **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) God revealed to the prophet Zechariah that Zerubbabel overcame resistance through God's Spirit because of his complete faith in God; and Jesus confirmed that nothing is impossible through God, for those who have complete faith in Him. Therefore, through prayer and having complete faith without unbelief, there is no obstacle that cannot be overcome by God's Holy Spirit.

2) We come to know God through reading, hearing and practicing Jesus' teaching and the Word of God found in the ancient Holy Scriptures. It was reflected in previous Chapters, that a person becomes transformed through God's Spirit, and that Jesus taught this transformation happens through faith. In this Chapter, Jesus has now revealed that full transformation to complete faith, also requires prayer and fasting. Therefore, these two activities are essential for overcoming any unbelief that might be present in our faith.

# The Children are Exempt

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 17, Verses 22-27

22 While they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "**The Son of Man is about to be delivered up into the hands of men, 23 and they will kill him, and the third day he will be raised up.**" They were exceedingly sorry.

24 When they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the didrachma coins came to Peter, and said, "Doesn't your teacher pay the didrachma?" 25 He said, "Yes." When he came into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "**What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth receive toll or tribute? From their children, or from strangers?**"

26 Peter said to him, "From strangers." Jesus said to him, "**Therefore the children are exempt. 27 But, lest we cause them to stumble, go to the sea, cast a hook, and take up the first fish that comes up. When you have opened its mouth, you will find a stater coin. Take that, and give it to them for me and you.**"

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 17, Verses 22-27

1) Once again, Jesus told His disciples that He was "**about to be delivered up into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up.**" It is written that the disciple's response was "**they were exceedingly sorry.**" Their response indicates a few things: I) They did not appear to understand the depth of what Jesus had told them II) They did not ask Jesus to further explain this great prediction III) The disciples' faith was still weak because even though Jesus clearly stated that He would be raised up again, their feelings of sorrow indicated that their focus was on His death.

2) When the disciples arrived in Capernaum, Peter was approached by "**those who collected the didrachma coins.**" The Drachma was the currency used, and a "didrachma" was the value of two drachma coins. These men were collecting money that was meant to go toward the service costs of the temple, and all the men of Israel were required to pay these fees. These men posed a question to Peter, asking "**Doesn't your teacher pay the didrachma?**", wondering if Jesus paid His temple fees too. Peter responded "**Yes**", but then went to see Jesus about that question. Anticipating Peter's curiosity, Jesus asked Peter a new question, saying "**From whom do the kings of the earth receive toll or tribute? From their children, or from strangers?**" Jesus was referring to the way in which Kings collected their income. Peter answered correctly, saying "**From strangers**", meaning that a King does not charge his own children to help support the running of his Kingdom, but rather, he collects money from the people who live in his Kingdom. Jesus responded by saying "**Therefore the children are exempt**", confirming that the King's children are not required to pay anything. Here Jesus was comparing the children of Kings with the children of God. Just as earthly Kings do not charge their own

children to be part of their Kingdom, neither does God charge His children to be part of His Heavenly Kingdom.

3) After Jesus revealed that the children of God were not required to pay to be part of the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus said "**But lest we cause them to stumble**", meaning that He accepted the temple fees, and didn't want to create any resistance against them; because that might cause people to lose faith in Him and what He was teaching them about God and the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, Jesus' wishes were to pay the fees. Once again, Jesus relied on God to provide for Him, and a "stater coin" was miraculously found inside the mouth of a fish, which was enough to cover the temple fees for both Peter and Jesus.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus taught that when it comes to being part of God's Kingdom "**the children are exempt**", meaning that for those who become the children of God, access to His Kingdom is freely given. This does not mean that access is without requirements, but it is available without a financial commitment, and Jesus' teachings provide us with what is required to become God's children.

2) In Chapter 6, Jesus said, "**Don't be anxious, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? or, With what will we be clothed? ... for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well.'**" In this Chapter, God miraculously provided the required stator coin to pay for both Jesus and Peter's temple fees, which physically demonstrated this teaching of Jesus. This is also a perfect example of how God provides for His faithful people, whenever they are in need and look to Him for help.



# Occasions of Stumbling

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 18, Verses 1-9

1 In that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" 2 Jesus called a little child to himself, and set him in the middle of them, 3 and said, "**Most certainly I tell you, unless you turn, and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.** 4 **Whoever therefore humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.** 5 **Whoever receives one such little child in my name receives me,** 6 **but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him if a huge millstone were hung around his neck, and that he were sunk in the depths of the sea.** 7 **"Woe to the world because of occasions of stumbling! For it must be that the occasions come, but woe to that person through whom the occasion comes!** 8 **If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire.** 9 **If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the Gehenna of fire.**

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 18, Verses 1-9

1) When the disciples asked Jesus "**who then is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven**", He didn't immediately answer their question. Instead, He placed a small child among them as a reference, and said "**unless you turn, and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.**" This example was meant to refocus the disciples' attention on the more important question of "How can a person enter into the Kingdom of Heaven?" Jesus then revealed the answer to their question by saying, "**Whoever therefore humbles himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.**" The type of humility found in children is pure and honest, and it's not natural for children to think of themselves as being greater than each other. Jesus began by saying "**unless you turn, and become as little children.**" The word "**turn**" implies a change in direction. Therefore, by this Jesus meant that people must change their attitude toward each other, and believe that all people are equal, in the same way that children naturally do. In addition, people must not set their hearts on social status or the honors of this world, as they too lead people away from humility. By using a child as an example, Jesus made it easy to understand that this is how it is in the Kingdom of Heaven, and what is required from those who wish to become part of God's Kingdom.

This teaching also reflects what Jesus taught earlier in Chapter 10, when He said "**A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his lord.**" In saying

this, Jesus, the teacher and servant of God, was explaining that we are not meant to rise one above another and that no one is greater than God.

2) Little children naturally accept Jesus with faith and complete belief, unless they have been influenced by the opinions and disbeliefs of others. On this point Jesus said, "**Whoever receives one such little child in my name receives me.**" In saying "**one such little child**", Jesus may have been pointing toward "one who has faith like that of a little child", which then refers to all people who have faith in Jesus. Therefore, the full message that Jesus was teaching was: Those who encourage, accept and receive people of faith in Jesus are also receiving Jesus too.

3) Jesus then warned "**but whoever causes one of these little ones who believes in me to stumble, it would be better for him that a huge millstone should be hung around his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depths of the sea.**" Here Jesus provided an extreme warning against leading other people away from their faith in Jesus and turning them toward disbelief. Jesus painted a desperate picture for those who behave in this way, saying that "**it would be better**" for them to experience forced drowning than to experience what actually awaits their final fate.

4) Three key warnings are revealed in Jesus' next few sentences. I) Jesus said; "**Woe to the world because of occasions of stumbling!**" Here Jesus was warning the whole world that occasions for people to "stumble", or lose faith in Jesus and God, do exist. II) Next Jesus warned "**For it must be that the occasions come**", which revealed that occasions for a person to "stumble" in their faith must exist and are necessary. III) And finally, Jesus warned "**But woe to that person through whom the occasion comes.**" Once again, He was warning against leading others away from their faith. Jesus continued along this point, revealing that people themselves can be the cause of their own "stumbling" too. Jesus again used the extreme examples He used in Chapter 5, where He said it's better for a person to pluck out their own eye, or cut off their own hand, and enter into a life in Heaven, than to continue to "stumble" and face the consequences of their own actions. Once again, Jesus referred to being "**cast into the Gehenna of fire**", as a reminder to fear the wrath of God, who is able to destroy both the body and soul of those who turn away from God.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) In this Chapter, Jesus said "**Whoever receives one such little child in my name receives me.**" This comment also reflects what He taught His disciples earlier in Chapter 10, when He was preparing them to go out and preach His teachings, when He said "**He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me.**" Jesus was simply saying that anyone who receives and accepts people who have faith in Jesus and His teachings, will not only be receiving Jesus but will also be receiving God too.

2) From Jesus' warning against leading people away from their faith in Him, we can also interpret the opposite side of the warning for which people of faith can rejoice. The warning revealed just how truly rewarding the Kingdom of Heaven must be, in that people would be so harshly punished for deceiving others out of the reward that God has waiting for His people of faith.

3) Jesus' warnings about the occasions for stumbling can be very helpful for us, as we grow in our faith. Jesus taught that these occasions are supposed to exist. Therefore, they can be used to help us increase our faith by remaining on guard against these occasions, and turning to the teachings of Jesus and asking for God's help to overcome them, whenever they present themselves.

# Saving That Which Is Lost

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 18, Verses 10-14

**10 See that you don't despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. 11 For the Son of Man came to save that which was lost.**

**12 "What do you think? If a man has one hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, doesn't he leave the ninety-nine, go to the mountains, and seek that which has gone astray? 13 If he finds it, most certainly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.**

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 18, Verses 10-14

1) Jesus continued to teach His disciples about accepting and rejecting the "**little ones**", which are people growing in their faith and belief. On this point, Jesus said "**See that you don't despise one of these little ones.**" The term "despise" can be interpreted as "reject", "disregard" or "undervalue." This sentence supports Jesus' teachings from the beginning of this Chapter, where He taught that everyone is equal in God's Kingdom, and that no one is above another. Here Jesus made it clear that each and every person is important, and that their faith and belief must be encouraged to grow and strengthen, to keep them from "stumbling" or losing their faith.

2) Next, it is written that Jesus said, "**for I tell you that in Heaven their angels always see the face of my father who is in Heaven.**" Here Jesus was revealing that angels in Heaven always see God's face. In contrast, Jesus has been teaching that people must have faith, believe and seek God, in order to receive the hidden knowledge of Him. Therefore, people on earth must follow a path of faith to be given the knowledge of God, whereas the angels in Heaven know God, because they always see His face. Jesus made this statement as a continuation of "**See that you don't despise one of these little ones.**" New faith in God can be fragile and those just coming to faith can easily stumble and lose their faith because they don't physically see the face of God in the same way angels do, therefore, people are to support the faith of others rather than discourage them.

3) Jesus then said, "**For the Son of Man came to save that which was lost**", and He went on to share the example of the lost sheep. Jesus used this example to clearly show how much God values every person, even those who have lost their faith and gone astray from Him; and how much He wants them to return. Jesus summarized this by saying "**Even so, it is not the will of your father who is in Heaven that one of these little ones should perish.**" Jesus was teaching that people may lose faith and go astray and yet God's will is that they would return to Him. Jesus said that the

reason He came was to "**save that which was lost**", meaning that He came to teach the path of faith and belief, and reach those who have lost their faith.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The comment Jesus made about angels knowing God because they always see His face, in contrast with our need to follow a path of faith to know God, supports Jesus' teaching against leading people away from their faith, and highlights the importance of encouraging faithful people to know that they are on the right path.

2) Jesus taught His disciples the important message about not rejecting or undervaluing the "**little ones**", which refers to people whose faith is weak or their journey to faith is just beginning. This teaching remains just as important today, because all people are equal in God's eyes. By encouraging others, their faith can grow and their trust in God strengthens to help them overcome the occasions that cause people to stumble.

# Sins and Forgiveness

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 18, Verses 15-35

15 "If your brother sins against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained back your brother. 16 But if he doesn't listen, take one or two more with you, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the assembly. If he refuses to hear the assembly also, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector. 18 Most certainly I tell you, whatever things you bind on earth will have been bound in Heaven, and whatever things you release on earth will have been released in Heaven. 19 Again, assuredly I tell you, that if two of you will agree on earth concerning anything that they will ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in Heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the middle of them."

21 Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I don't tell you until seven times, but, until seventy times seven. 23 Therefore the Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, who wanted to reconcile accounts with his servants. 24 When he had begun to reconcile, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But because he couldn't pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, with his wife, his children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will repay you all!' 27 The lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. 28 "But that servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, who owed him one hundred denarii, and he grabbed him, and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' 29 "So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you!' 30 He would not, but went and cast him into prison, until he should pay back that which was due. 31 So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were exceedingly sorry, and came and told their lord all that was done. 32 Then his lord called him in, and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt, because you begged me. 33 Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, even as I had mercy on you?' 34 His lord was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors, until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 So my heavenly Father will also do to you, if you don't each forgive your brother from your hearts for his misdeeds."

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 18, Verses 15-35

1) Jesus instructed His disciples how to deal with a brother who has committed a sin against them (in this case brother refers to a fellow believer). Jesus taught: 1) First discuss the sin in private, one on one, to bring the circumstance up and try to help

the person acknowledge and repent of their sin. II) If they refuse to listen to a private conversation, then approach them with one or two additional witnesses, for support, who will also point out their sin. III) If that still doesn't work, then the situation should be shared openly with "the assembly" to help the person recognize their sin through the encouragement of the group. (In Chapter 16, it was explained that "the assembly" refers to a group of faithful followers of Jesus' teachings). IV) Finally, Jesus said **"If he refuses to hear the assembly also, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector."** The term "Gentiles" refers to all people who are not Israelites, so this reference meant people who do not have faith or belief in the God of the Israelites. The term "tax collector" was used as a comparison for sinful people. Therefore, Jesus was saying that if a person refuses to acknowledge their sin, and further refuses to repent of their sin, then that person's beliefs are not in line with the beliefs of God's faithful people, and therefore should not be considered to be a person of faith.

2) Just as Jesus taught in Chapter 16, He again repeated **"whatever things you bind on earth will have been bound in Heaven, and whatever things you release on earth will have been released in Heaven"**, which was interpreted as God's will in Heaven is done on earth through those who have faith and believe in Jesus. And so, whatever the people of His assembly can bring together in Jesus' name, will have already been **"bound in Heaven"**, and whatever the people of His assembly let go of in Jesus' name, will have already been **"released in Heaven"**; and all these things will be revealed to the people of His assembly through their faith. In this Chapter, the application of this teaching applies toward helping people stay on the path of Jesus' teachings and living according to God's will.

3) Jesus continued His teaching, saying **"Again, assuredly I tell you, that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they will ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in Heaven."** Jesus began this sentence with **"Again"**, to return to His initial teaching about how to deal with a person who has committed a sin against another. On this point, Jesus then said, **"if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they will ask"**, meaning when two people agree that a sin has been committed, and pray to God that His will be done to deal with the issue; Jesus then said **"it will be done for them by my Father who is in Heaven"**, meaning that God will provide the support needed to address the situation. Since this statement followed the point of God's will being carried out through His faithful people, Jesus was once again confirming the relationship that exists between God and His faithful people, through prayer.

Just as Jesus taught His disciples in the previous Chapter **"if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you"**, this new teaching reflects that same meaning, in that through faith and prayer, the power of God and His Holy Spirit can overcome all obstacles.

4) Jesus further added to His last statement by saying **"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the middle of them."** Here Jesus

has promised that whenever people gather together in His name, Jesus Himself will be present among them. Jesus will teach more about His presence among His faithful people in a future Chapter.

5) Next, it is written that Peter asked "**how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?**" This follows the teaching about helping people to recognize the sins they commit against each other. Jesus taught that once confronted through various approaches, if a person refuses to recognize and repent of their sin, then that person's beliefs are not in line with the beliefs of God's faithful people, and therefore should no longer be considered to be a person of faith. However, Jesus' reply to Peter's question revealed that this does not mean that they should not be forgiven. On this point, Jesus made it clear that forgiveness should never be withheld, but rather, must always be sincerely offered. Jesus used the example of a compassionate King to reveal that the Kingdom of Heaven is one of complete forgiveness, but through the example of the servant who refused to forgive, Jesus warned that God deals accordingly with people who refuse to sincerely forgive others from their hearts.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Again, Jesus taught "**whatever things you bind on earth will have been bound in Heaven, and whatever things you release on earth will have been released in Heaven.**" This teaching reveals the great honor that has been given to people who put their faith and trust in Jesus. In addition, it shows the great responsibility that we have to do God's will on earth, because His will is revealed and carried out through those who have faith and believe in Him.

2) Jesus said "**For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the middle of them**", which is a promise that Jesus will be a living presence in a person's life, and that He will enter into a personal relationship with whomever calls on His name.

3) These teachings of Jesus, and His parable of the King and servant, reveal that by praying and faithfully asking God for help, He will overcome the challenges that are created by sin, and enable the forgiveness needed to heal the harm created by those who have sinned against us; and at the same time, how to keep ourselves in good standing and aligned with God's will.



# Divorce and Adultery

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 19, Verses 1-12

1 When Jesus had finished these words, he departed from Galilee, and came into the borders of Judea beyond the Jordan. 2 Great multitudes followed him, and he healed them there. 3 Pharisees came to him, testing him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?" 4 He answered, "**Haven't you read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?' 6 So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, don't let man tear apart.**"

7 They asked him, "Why then did Moses command us to give her a certificate of divorce, and divorce her?" 8 He said to them, "**Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so. 9 I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her when she is divorced commits adultery.**" 10 His disciples said to him, "If this is the case of the man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry." 11 But he said to them, "**Not all men can receive this saying, but those to whom it is given. 12 For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. He who is able to receive it, let him receive it.**"

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 19, Verses 1-12

1) Jesus continued to heal a multitude of people as they followed Him into the border regions of Judea. In Chapter 10, it was reflected that the people of Israel had been divided into two main regions. The northern region was made up of ten of the tribes of Israel, and they called their region "Israel"; the southern part was made up of the two remaining tribes of Israel, and their region became known as "Judah." The term "Judea" also refers to this area and it includes the ancient city of Jerusalem.

2) Once again, the Pharisees tried to "test" Jesus by asking Him if it were "**lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason.**" Jesus responded, "**Haven't you read that He who made them from the beginning made them male and female**", which was a reference to the ancient Book of Genesis, where God's creation of man and woman is described. Jesus then quoted from Genesis, Chapter, 2 Verse 24, where it is written "**Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will be one flesh.**" In Chapter 2, Verse 18, of this ancient Book, after God had created man, it is written that "**Yahweh God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helper comparable to him'**", and then God created woman. Jesus next added His own words, saying "**What therefore God has joined together, don't let man tear apart.**" By saying these

things, Jesus was revealing that divorce is not acceptable to God. In fact, it is written in the ancient Book of Malachi, Chapter 2, Verse 16, "**For I hate divorce, says Yahweh, the God of Israel.**"

3) The Pharisees continued to press Jesus on their question, asking, "**Why then did Moses command us to give her a bill of divorce, and divorce her?**" In Chapter 5, it was reflected that the Books of "the Law" were written by Moses, and they were meant to instruct people about how to live according to God's will. Therefore, the Pharisees were trying to "test" Jesus against these laws. Jesus indicated that it was Moses who had made this exception, as a result of the hardness of the people's hearts, meaning that it was never a commandment given by God. Then Jesus reconfirmed that divorce was never God's will, by saying "**but from the beginning it has not been so.**" The only exception that Jesus made where divorce is acceptable, is if a person commits sexual immorality and adultery.

4) The disciples too had believed that divorce was acceptable because of the laws of Moses. In response to what Jesus had just revealed, they questioned Him whether or not it was wise for a man to marry at all if he could never get divorced. Jesus did not respond to their question directly, but instead began to talk about eunuchs. But before Jesus mentioned anything about eunuchs, He said, "**Not all men can receive this saying, but those to whom it is given.**" A eunuch is a man who does not have the physical ability to create children. Jesus first pointed to men who were born that way, and then to men who are physically made into eunuchs by other men. These two types of eunuchs would not marry, because of their physical condition. Next, Jesus referred to a third type of eunuch, which are men who choose to dedicate themselves to the Kingdom of Heaven, rather than to marry and raise a family. After pointing out this third kind of eunuch, He said; "**He who is able to receive it, let him receive it.**" In saying this, together with His opening sentence, Jesus was pointing out that not all men are able to dedicate their lives to the causes of the Kingdom of Heaven, instead of getting married.

In summary, Jesus answered the disciples question in two ways. 1) His response to the Pharisees' questions pointed His disciples back to the Book of Genesis, where God revealed that men and women should marry so that they are not alone and can help each other. 2) His reference to eunuchs revealed that, other than men who are physically unable to have children, there are those who dedicate themselves to the causes of the Kingdom of Heaven, and their life path is not one of marriage.

**Special Note:** In the ancient Book of Isaiah, the prophet wrote about a special honor that God has reserved specifically for eunuchs dedicated to the Kingdom of Heaven. In Isaiah, Chapter 56, Verses 4-5, it is written "**For Yahweh says, "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and hold fast to my covenant: I will give them in my house and within my walls a memorial and a name better than of sons and of daughters. I will give them an everlasting name, that will not be cut off."**

## Considerations for people seeking to know God

1) Jesus teachings about divorce, clearly indicates that divorce is an instrument created by man that is not acceptable to God. The only exception Jesus made was sexual immorality, which also reveals just how great the sin of adultery is.

2) Jesus' words "**What therefore God has joined together, don't let man tear apart**", revealed that it is God who works to connect people together for the sake of marriage. Therefore, since it is God's will that people should marry one another, and He works to bring people together, then the bond of marriage is extremely Holy and should be respected.

3) Jesus taught that there are certain men "**to whom it is given**" the desire and ability to devote their lives to the Kingdom of Heaven, rather than choosing a life path that includes marriage. Jesus made it clear though that "**Not all men can receive this**" kind of devotion. However, through the writings of the prophet Isaiah, it was revealed that those who are able to choose this path, will receive a special blessing from God for their dedication to the Kingdom of Heaven and for doing God's work on earth.

# God's Kingdom and Eternal Life

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 19, Verses 13-30

13 Then little children were brought to him, that he should lay his hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. 14 But Jesus said, "**Allow the little children, and don't forbid them to come to me; for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these.**" 15 He laid his hands on them, and departed from there.

16 Behold, one came to him and said, "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" 17 He said to him, "**Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.**" 18 He said to him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'**You shall not murder.**' '**You shall not commit adultery.**' '**You shall not steal.**' '**You shall not offer false testimony.**' 19 '**Honor your father and your mother.**' And, '**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**'" 20 The young man said to him, "All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus said to him, "**If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.**" 22 But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions. 23 Jesus said to his disciples, "**Most certainly I say to you, a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into God's Kingdom.**"

25 When the disciples heard it, they were exceedingly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" 26 Looking at them, Jesus said, "**With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**" 27 Then Peter answered, "Behold, we have left everything, and followed you. What then will we have?" 28 Jesus said to them, "**Most certainly I tell you that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on the throne of his glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 Everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many will be last who are first; and first who are last.**"

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 19, Verses 13-30

1) The disciples scolded people for bringing their children to Jesus, to have Him lay His hands on them and pray for them, but Jesus responded, "**Allow the little children, and don't forbid them to come to me.**" In saying this, Jesus taught that people should not be discouraged from introducing their children to Jesus, and He then continued "**for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these.**" These words of Jesus echo what He already taught regarding "little children." If we refer back to Chapter 18, when the disciples asked Jesus "**who then is the greatest in the**

**Kingdom of Heaven"**, He placed a small child among them, and said "**unless you turn, and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.**" This example was meant to refocus the disciple's attention toward the more important question of: How can a person enter into the Kingdom of Heaven? Jesus then revealed the answer to their question by saying; "**Whoever therefore humbles himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.**" The type of humility found in children is pure and honest, and it's not natural for children to think of themselves as being greater than each other, and by using a child as an example, Jesus made it easy to understand that this is how it is in the Kingdom of Heaven. In this Chapter, Jesus said that "**the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these**", to remind His disciples that all are equal, and that people must turn and become humble like "little children", in order to align with and be accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven.

2) A man approached Jesus, and said "**Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?**" Jesus' first response was to pose a question back to the man, saying; "**Why do you call me good?**" He then went on to say, "**No one is good but one, that is, God.**" Here, Jesus was referring to the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 14, Verses 1-3, and Psalms, Chapter 53, Verses 1-3 where in both cases it is written; "**There is no one who does good. God looks down from Heaven on the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all gone aside. They have together become corrupt. There is no one who does good, no, not one.**" These Verses from the Book of Psalms add context to what Jesus was saying and reveal the depth of Jesus' words. God looks to see if any people are doing "good", meaning are they seeking to know and understand Him, but He finds they have all turned away to seek after their own interests. Jesus then answered the man's question, telling him to "**keep the commandments**", (which are the ancient laws written by Moses, as referred to in previous Chapters). The man continued to press Jesus, saying that he has followed the commandments from his youth, and then said, "**What do I still lack?**" Jesus responded with, "**If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven**". These words reflect Jesus previous teachings about how seeking after the things of this world draws people away from seeking after God and the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus then added "**and come follow me**", which meant to follow Jesus' teachings. Next, it is written that the man "**went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions.**" Therefore, through Jesus' words and by this man's reaction to what He heard, we are provided with an example of someone willingly turning away from the treasure in Heaven and preferring to focus on the things of this world.

3) The event of the rich man asking Jesus what "**he must do to have eternal life**", and then going away sad after Jesus told him to sell his possessions, is also recorded in the ancient Books of Mark and Luke. Jesus' response to the man turning away, was recorded in this Book of Matthew as "**a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty.**" In the Book of Mark, Jesus also added "**Children, how hard is it for those who trust in riches to enter into God's Kingdom**"; and, in the

Book of Luke, Jesus said "**How hard it is for those who have riches to enter into God's Kingdom.**" These subtle variations between the recorded text in these three Books, reveal the full picture of the rich man's experience, and explain what the disciples and those surrounding them witnessed. They witnessed a rich man who was not willing to give up his possessions, even in exchange for eternal life. In fact, it is written "**he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions**", so the idea of having to give up his worldly possessions actually made him sad. This revealed just how important his worldly possessions were to him, in that he was willing to give up his future eternal life in order to keep his possessions during his temporary earthly life.

4) Upon seeing the man's response Jesus said, "**Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into God's Kingdom.**" Jesus used this comparison of an impossible act to illustrate and support the truth that focusing on the riches of this world is in conflict with God's Kingdom; which is the same message that Jesus has been teaching in previous Chapters. However, in this case He actually had the response of a rich person to showcase as an example.

5) After witnessing the response of the rich man, and learning the certainty of his destiny, we read that the disciples "**were exceedingly astonished**"! This rich man had kept the commandments since his youth, and thought he had enough wealth to pay for whatever might be required to secure his eternal life. This confused the disciples because this man had much more "worldly" advantage than most, and yet, it was of no value to him at all when it came to the Kingdom of God. As a result, the disciples questioned Jesus, saying "**who then can be saved?**" Jesus' reply was, "**With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**" In saying this, Jesus revealed that eternal life is only available from God, and that it is not possible for a person to achieve eternal life without God.

6) In response to what the disciples had just learned, Peter said to Jesus "**Behold, we have left everything, and followed you. What then will we have?**" Jesus answered, "**Most certainly I tell you that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on the throne of his glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**" In order to understand these words of Jesus, we can refer back to what has been written about Jesus and His teachings so far. Jesus taught that following Him leads to eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven; and the disciples were in fact the first people to follow Jesus. The term "regeneration" is a translation of the original Greek word used, which was "palingenesia", which comes from palin (which means "again") and genesia (meaning birth). So the term "regeneration" refers to a type of "rebirth." It has been reflected that Jesus referred to Himself as the "Son of Man", and so here He was predicting that He would be sitting on a throne during the time of "the rebirth." Jesus taught on several occasions that He will one day be in His Father's Kingdom. A throne is the place for a King, and so Jesus was here revealing that He would be King in His Father's Kingdom. Jesus also previously taught that a day of judgement would



come, when everyone will be accountable for their actions in this life, and so Jesus was here referring to that time of Judgement as "**the regeneration**" or a time of rebirth.

Therefore, if we combine all of these elements and teachings together, we can interpret a clearer picture of what Jesus was saying to His disciples. Jesus was assuring the disciples that they would have a place in God's Heavenly Kingdom, because they were following Jesus and living according to His teachings. Jesus was also revealing that He would be King in the Kingdom of Heaven, and that they would be there with Him. And finally, when the time of judgement comes, which would be a time of rebirth, the disciples themselves would be the ones to judge the people of Israel.

7) Next, Jesus revealed the good news that "**Everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children or lands for my name's sake, will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life.**" In other words, everyone who has "turned" or "changed direction" in their life's focus from worldly things to a life focused on following Jesus' teachings, will be rewarded with an eternal life in Heaven. This also aligns with Chapter 16, when Jesus said "**For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it**", to show that a life focused on the ways of this world leads to death, but that giving up the ways of this world and following Jesus' teachings, leads to an everlasting life.

8) Jesus' final words in this Chapter are "**But many will be last who are first; and first who are last**". Jesus will expand upon this teaching in the next Chapter. Rather than reflecting upon this statement here, the meaning of this will become clear when we reflect upon Jesus' expansion of this teaching later.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Regarding the reflections on the term "regeneration" referring to a type of "rebirth", as new followers of Jesus' teachings we too experience a form of spiritual rebirth. In the parables from Chapter 13, it was reflected that: In the same way that a mustard seed becomes a tree and yeast makes the other ingredients rise; the seed of God's "Word" begins as a small instrument of change that grows within a person to spiritually transform them into a new person of faith, as they follow Jesus' teachings and seek to understand the knowledge of God. For followers of Jesus' teachings, this transformation is sometimes referred to as "being born again."

2) In this Chapter, Jesus said about the children that "**the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these**", to remind His disciples that all are equal, and that people must turn and become humble like "little children" in order to align with and be accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus spoke this teaching as little children were being brought to him for His blessing, and so we have been given an example of how to accept Jesus and God with faith and complete belief, in the same way that

little children do, who have not been influenced by opinions of disbelief and are not focused on the things of this world.

3) Jesus promised His disciples that they would receive their eternal reward because they have followed Him, and that same promise is available to everyone who turns and follows Jesus. This promise can strengthen our faith, knowing that we too have a teacher who will help lead us toward a promised inheritance of eternal life.

4) Jesus' response to the man who asked how to **"have eternal life"** revealed that, in order to have eternal life we are required to turn our focus away from the things of this world, keep God's commandments, and follow Jesus' teachings. However, Jesus also said **"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"**, to make it clear that eternal life is a gift from God, and it's not possible for us to have eternal life solely through our own efforts. Eternal life can only be made possible through and from God.

5) The example of the rich man's unwillingness to give up his possessions, is a reminder of how things of this world can lead us away from the true riches of the Kingdom of Heaven. Keeping that in mind can help us resist worldly temptations that attract us away from seeking God's Kingdom. In Chapter 6, Jesus taught that God knows our needs and will provide for us, when He said **"your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well."**

6) Jesus said, **"Everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children or lands for my name's sake, will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life."** These words provide an incredible comparison to the promise that God made to Abraham, thousands of years before Jesus' birth. In the "Historical Background" section of this book, the history of Abraham was described from the ancient Book of Genesis. It is written that God said to Abraham **"Leave your country, and your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and I will curse him who curses you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."** Just as God promised that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham, if he left his country and family and faithfully followed God into the promised land; in the same way, Jesus here promises that everyone who turns away from worldly connections and treasures and faithfully follows His teachings will receive the blessing of eternal life, and be led into the promised land of God's Kingdom.



## Kingdom of Heaven – Parables 2

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 20, Verses 1-16

**1 "For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who was the master of a household, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 He went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace. 4 He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went their way. 5 Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. 6 About the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle. He said to them, 'Why do you stand here all day idle?' 7 "They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' "He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and you will receive whatever is right.' 8 When evening had come, the lord of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning from the last to the first.' 9 "When those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came, they each received a denarius. 10 When the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise each received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they murmured against the master of the household, 12 saying, 'These last have spent one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat!' 13 "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Didn't you agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take that which is yours, and go your way. It is my desire to give to this last just as much as to you. 15 Isn't it lawful for me to do what I want to with what I own? Or is your eye evil, because I am good?' 16 So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few are chosen."**

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 20, Verses 1-16

1) This Chapter begins with a new parable about the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus said, **"For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who was the master of a household,"** which was a reference to God in Heaven. Jesus continued **"Who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard."** In this parable, Jesus repeated that the master of the household **"went out"** four times to find laborers over the course of a day, indicating that God is constantly reaching out to people to bring them to faith. In each case, the master of the household sends those he finds into his vineyard to labor for him. At the end of the day, the master rewards the laborers equally with the same pay, regardless of how long they worked. However, those who worked a full day resented the laborers who only worked an hour but received the same wage. Jesus used this parable of the laborers and their expectations of what they should receive, to illustrate people's misunderstanding of how God really is. God gives all people who believe in Him, have faith in Him, seek to know Him, and share their faith with others with the same reward. Just as was reflected in Chapters 9 and 10, the laborers in this vineyard are a parable for God's faithful people who are sharing their faith and God's Word with others. And, from this parable, Jesus was

teaching that all who have faith in God and share His Word with others, will be equally rewarded in Heaven, regardless of how long they have had faith or how much they have shared His Word.

2) The second last sentence of this parable repeats His words from the last sentence in Chapter 19, saying "**So the last will be first, and the first last**", but Jesus now adds an important key supporting statement to help understand His meaning, by saying "**For many are called, but few are chosen.**" In Chapter 10, it was reflected that many people come to faith in God through an instinctive sense that they have been called, and they are drawn toward God because of this calling. In the ancient Book of John, Chapter 10, Jesus said "**I am the good shepherd... I have other sheep, which are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice.**" These words of Jesus support an instinctive sense of "calling" that many people feel, which draws them toward God. In Chapter 19, when the rich man asked Jesus what He should do to have eternal life, Jesus said "**sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; come, follow me.**" but in response to this, the young man went away sad because he had great possessions. Therefore, "**the last will be first, and the first last**" is about those who are first and last in this world. The first are those who are top in this world, whose focus is on worldly gain and possessions. The last are the poor and those who don't place their focus on worldly gain, but focus on the Heavenly realm instead.

The new supporting statement "**For many are called, but few are chosen**", refers to the calling to seek God and live according to His will; The words "**but few are chosen**", does not imply rejection, just the opposite, these words refer to God's acceptance of all people who do His will, however few they may be. So, even though many may feel a calling to seek God, few actually act upon this calling. Therefore, those who reject a life of worldly gain would be last in this world, but first in the next. Whereas, those who are first in this world, because of their focus on worldly gain, would be last in the next. And, even though many may be called to reject this world and seek God, few will follow to become "the chosen".

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Special Consideration: The parable of the master and His vineyard is unique from the other parables that Jesus taught so far, because this parable specifically teaches about God.

2) This parable reveals that the rewards of the Kingdom of Heaven are available to everyone who faithfully seeks God, lives according to His will, and shares their faith and God's Word with others.

3) Regardless of whether a person comes to faith early or late in life, the rewards of the Kingdom of Heaven will be given equally to everyone who comes to faith in God; and it is through following Jesus' teachings and living according to God's will that we become God's chosen.

# Authority verses Serving

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 20, Verses 17-28

17 As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, 18 **"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, 19 and will hand him over to the Gentiles to mock, to scourge, and to crucify; and the third day he will be raised up."**

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, kneeling and asking a certain thing of him. 21 He said to her, **"What do you want?"** She said to him, "Command that these, my two sons, may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand, in your Kingdom." 22 But Jesus answered, **"You don't know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"** They said to him, "We are able." 23 He said to them, **"You will indeed drink my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with, but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it is for whom it has been prepared by my Father."** 24 When the ten heard it, they were indignant with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus summoned them, and said, **"You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 26 It shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 27 Whoever desires to be first among you shall be your bond servant, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 20, Verses 17-28

1) In Chapter 16, it is written that Jesus **"began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed and the third day be raised up."** In Chapter 17, Jesus said to His disciples that **"The Son of Man is about to be delivered up into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and the third day he will be raised up."** Now in this Chapter, Jesus predicted the exact process and details of what would happen to Him after He arrived in Jerusalem. Jesus predicted: I) That He would be **"delivered"** to the chief priests and scribes of Israel II) That they would be the ones who would **"condemn him to death"** III) That He would then be **"handed over to the Gentiles"** IV) That the Gentiles would, **"mock"** and **"scourge"** Him. V) The Gentiles would then **"crucify"** Him. VI) And finally, on **"the third day he will be raised up."** We will read in later Chapters that each one of these very specific details would actually happen to Jesus.

2) Even though Jesus knew the specific, painful and humiliating details of the fate that was waiting for Him in Jerusalem, He accepted these as His destiny, and willingly continued on to Jerusalem, in order to allow them to happen.

3) It is recorded that James and John came to Jesus with their mother, and she made a special request for her two sons. She wanted her two sons to be given the honor of sitting on either side of Jesus in His Kingdom, as if they were special and above the other disciples. In Jesus' response, we find the following reflections: I) Jesus said **"You don't know what you are asking"**, then He qualified this comment by saying **"Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink,"** which was a reference to His upcoming death, and in their case, Jesus was asking if these disciples were willing to suffer the consequences that would come from being a follower of Jesus. Jesus then continued **"and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"**, which meant to accept and receive the spiritual baptism that comes from the Holy Spirit of God, just as Jesus was baptized with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Jesus was asking them about their willingness to suffer for Jesus' sake and be transformed through the Holy Spirit into new people of faith in God. They responded by saying **"We are able"** II) Jesus then confirmed that they **"will indeed drink my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with"**, meaning that they would in fact go through these experiences. We will reflect more about the Holy Spirit in later Chapters.

4) Jesus told James and John that they **"don't know what you are asking"** and then later explained that it was not for Him to decide who would sit beside Him in His Kingdom, saying **"it is not mine to give: but it is for whom it has been prepared, by my Father."** To fully understand this comment, we can refer back to what was reflected in Chapter 18. In that Chapter, the disciples asked Jesus **"who then is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven"**, and Jesus did not immediately answer their question. Instead, He placed a small child among them, as a reference, and said **"unless you turn, and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."** This example was meant to refocus the disciple's attention on the more important question of: "How can a person enter into the Kingdom of Heaven?" Jesus then revealed the answer to their initial question, by saying **"Whoever therefore humbles himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."** The type of humility found in children is pure and honest, and it's not natural for children to think of themselves as being greater than each other. By using a child as an example, Jesus made it easy to understand how it is in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Therefore, if we reference that teaching together with Jesus saying **"You don't know what you are asking"** and explaining **"to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it is for whom it has been prepared by my Father"**, it becomes clear that the structure of Heaven is not like that of this world, where people attempt to become greater than each other, God alone decides the order of things in Heaven.

5) In the ancient Book of Mark, Chapter 10, beginning at Verse 35, this same event is recorded. However, in the Book of Mark, James and John make the request to Jesus themselves. In these Books, although the recording differs slightly, it is not important who made the request, but rather, how the request itself caused a

negative reaction from the other disciples. It is written that the request caused the other disciples to be "**indignant**" or annoyed with the two brothers. As a result, Jesus summoned them all together to teach a new lesson, about living a life aligned with God's will that would apply to them all. This teaching expanded upon the importance of humility, as Jesus explained that people are also meant to serve one another. Jesus pointed out that the accepted social status structure on earth does not represent God's will for humanity, by saying "**It shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.**" Jesus was teaching His disciples that they must serve other people in order to align themselves with God's will; and by using the term "**among you**", He was making it perfectly clear that this teaching specifically applied to them. Jesus then referred to Himself as their example, saying "**even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve**", so they would recognize that during their time with Jesus they witnessed a person who continuously honored God by giving Himself completely to others in love and service. Jesus finished His reference to Himself by saying; "**and to give his life as a ransom for many.**" We will reflect upon what Jesus meant by saying that He came "**to serve**" and to be "**a ransom for many**" in later Chapters.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The question that Jesus posed to the brothers about their willingness to suffer for His name sake and allowing the Holy Spirit to transform them, remains relevant for us today. It reveals that living a life of following Jesus' teachings is a choice that we make. The "baptism" that comes from the Holy Spirit of God can only happen when a person chooses to "drink the cup"; which means to give up a life focused on the things of this world, follow after Jesus, and seek God's will first, even if that requires us to suffer difficult consequences because of this choice we make.

2) Jesus taught that the structure of Heaven is unlike that of this world. In the same way that Jesus said to the brothers "**You don't know what you are asking**", we cannot fully understand the ways of Heaven. However, there is comfort in knowing that God has prepared a place in Heaven for those who seek after Him and live according to His will.

3) Jesus taught His disciples to live a life of service to others and to look to Him for their example, which in turn provides us with direction for our lives as well.

# Jesus Gives Sight To The Blind

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 20, Verses 29-34

29 As they went out from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. 30 Behold, two blind men sitting by the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, you son of David!" 31 The multitude rebuked them, telling them that they should be quiet, but they cried out even more, "Lord, have mercy on us, you son of David!" 32 Jesus stood still, and called them, and asked, "**What do you want me to do for you?**" 33 They told him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." 34 Jesus, being moved with compassion, touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received their sight, and they followed him.

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 20, Verses 29-34

1) The two blind men on the roadside called out to Jesus saying "**Lord, have mercy on us, you son of David.**" In calling Him "**Son of David**" they made it clear to Jesus that they believed He was the prophesied Messiah (the Anointed One) from the line of King David. And by saying "**Lord, have mercy on us**" they were also revealing to Jesus their faith in His ability to grant their request.

2) It is written that the crowd "**rebuked them**", meaning they spoke harshly, telling them to be quiet. The men were not discouraged by the crowd, in fact, "**they cried out even more**", until Jesus stopped and took notice of them.

3) Jesus' response was simply to ask the men "**What do you want me to do for you?**" Their reply was "**Lord, that our eyes may be opened.**" This is particularly interesting because they did not ask Jesus to restore their sight, so they could see again. In Chapter 13, it is written that Jesus said He spoke in parables because: "**seeing they don't see, and hearing, they don't hear, neither do they understand. In them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says, 'By hearing you will hear, and will in no way understand; Seeing you will see, and will in no way perceive'**"; and in Chapter 15, Jesus compared the Pharisees to blind men, because they were unable to see God's truth that was revealed to them by Jesus. This roadside event records these two men as being physically blind. However, based on what Jesus taught in previous Chapters, the way that these men made their request to Jesus and the faith they had, there appears to be more depth to this event than Jesus simply restoring their physical sight.

4) Next, it is written that Jesus was "**moved with compassion**", which indicates that He recognized the faith these men had in Him, and that their request touched His heart on an emotional level.

5) After Jesus touched their eyes it is written that the men "**received their sight, and they followed him**", which indicates that they did indeed receive their physical

sight, but they also received their spiritual sight as well, because they followed after Jesus.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Because of their faith in Jesus, the blind men persistently asked "**Lord, have mercy on us.**" Even though the crowd tried to stop them from calling out to Jesus, their faith was not discouraged. In the same way, people and the things of this world will try to spiritually blind us and prevent us from seeking God. It is only through constant faith and continuous seeking that we are given spiritual understanding and the knowledge of God.

2) It is written that Jesus "**touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received their sight, and they followed Him.**" Jesus gave them their sight and they followed Him. Whether they were asking for their physical sight to be restored, or asking to be given spiritual sight, or perhaps even both, Jesus responded to their request and as a result the men began to follow Him. This is another example of people turning to Jesus for help and then becoming a follower. The experience of these men on the roadside provides an example of faith for us. Similarly, we can be spiritually blinded by the things of this world that would lead us away from God, and this is one of the key lessons that Jesus has been teaching: Not to be blinded by the things of this world, have faith, ask Jesus for His help to receive the knowledge of God, and then follow after His teachings.



# Jesus' Entrance Into Jerusalem

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 21, Verses 1-11

1 When they came near to Jerusalem, and came to Bethsphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "**Go into the village that is opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them, and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and immediately he will send them.**" 4 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, 5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, behold, your King comes to you, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." 6 The disciples went, and did just as Jesus commanded them, 7 and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their clothes on them; and he sat on them. 8 A very great multitude spread their clothes on the road. Others cut branches from the trees, and spread them on the road. 9 The multitudes who went in front of him, and those who followed, kept shouting, "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

10 When he had come into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" 11 The multitudes said, "This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 21, Verses 1-11

**Special Note:** *In the ancient Book of Psalms, the complete Chapter of 118 is a prophecy of the specific circumstances that surrounded Jesus arrival into Jerusalem, as well as of the events that unfolded afterward. The particular details of these prophecies will be included in the references in this and the upcoming Chapters, as they align and unfold with Jesus' experiences.*

1) The first part of this Chapter recorded the events that led up to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. It is written that Jesus sent two of His disciples into a nearby village because there would be a donkey and colt tied there waiting for Him; which meant that Jesus somehow knew that the animals would be there. He said to His disciples that if anyone questioned them about taking the animals, they were to answer "**The Lord needs them, and immediately he will send them.**" In saying this, Jesus revealed that the animals would be there specifically for God's purpose, and that God would ensure that the disciples would not have any trouble bringing them to Jesus. This also meant that it was God who revealed to Jesus that the animals would be there waiting for Him.

2) Next, it is written that the donkey and foal were needed to fulfill an ancient prophecy about a king who would come riding on a donkey. Here Matthew was quoting from the ancient Book of Zechariah, Chapter 9, Verse 9, and the actual text is written as follows: "**Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you! He is righteous, and having**



**salvation; lowly, and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey."** This prophecy that Matthew was referring to actually predicts far more than just fulfilling Jesus' riding on a donkey. This ancient prophecy also predicted: I) There would be great rejoicing and shouting from the "daughter of Zion" and Jerusalem. Matthew wrote that the multitudes surrounding Jesus were shouting the praises **"Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord"**; and it is written that upon arriving in Jerusalem **"all the city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?"** The ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 118 praises God for His righteousness and His loving kindness, and in Verse 26 it is written **"Blessed is he who comes in Yahweh's name!"** This is the exact praise that the multitudes surrounding Jesus were recorded as shouting; and in calling Him **"son of David"**, they made it clear to Jesus that they believed He was the prophesied Messiah (the Anointed One) from the line of King David. II) Zechariah's prophecy also referenced Zion. The word Zion is found more than 150 times in ancient Scripture. Physically it was a fortified place on a hill within Jerusalem, which King David conquered and where he established his Kingdom (also known as the city of David). In some of the ancient Books of Scripture, Zion is expanded to represent all of Jerusalem, the city of God and the people of Israel. In other ancient Books of Scripture, the term Zion is further expanded to represent the people of God, God's Spiritual Kingdom, the city of the living God, and a Heavenly Jerusalem. In the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 76, Verses 1-2, the following is written: **"In Judah, God is known. His name is great in Israel. His tabernacle is also in Salem; His dwelling place in Zion."** The term "Tabernacle" means "tent of meeting", and it was known as a "tent of meeting" because that was where the Israelites would go to worship God and meet with His presence. This Psalm states that the tabernacle in Salem was a place of dwelling for God in Zion. The prophecy of Zechariah stated **"Shout, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you."** The words "daughter of Zion" implies "people of Zion", and so this prophecy was predicting that it would be the King of Zion, and by extension all that Zion represents, as well as the King of Jerusalem who would be coming to His people. III) The prophecy also predicted that this King will be righteous and have salvation for His people. We will reflect more about Jesus' righteousness and how He has salvation for His people in later Chapters. IV) Finally, the entrance of this King would be **"lowly"**, meaning humble, **"and riding on a donkey"**, which is unlike any entrance that would be expected from a King of this world.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The people of Israel had long waited for their promised Messiah (the anointed one) to arrive and lead them, and the praises from the multitude confirmed that they thought Jesus was their Messiah, descended from King David. However, although they thought Jesus was their Messiah King, whom God had promised through the ancient prophets, the people shouting His praises did not realize that Jesus was not meant to be a King to lead them in this world. They did not understand that God's promise was in fact for a King who would come to lead His people into God's Kingdom.

# Jesus In The Temple

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 21, Verses 12-16

12 Jesus entered into the temple of God, and drove out all of those who sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the money changers' tables and the seats of those who sold the doves. 13 He said to them, "**It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers!**"

14 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 who were crying in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the son of David!" they were indignant, 16 and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "**Yes. Did you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing babies you have perfected praise?'**"

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 21, Verses 12-16

1) Jesus entered into the temple of God in Jerusalem. This was the holiest place for the Israelite people, their only temple for worshipping God, presenting offerings to Him, and making animal sacrifices to thank and honor God, and receive His forgiveness for their sins. We will reflect further on making sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins in later Chapters.

2) Next, it is recorded that Jesus began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and He overthrew the tables where people were exchanging money; reminding them that the temple was meant to be a "**house of prayer.**" Here Jesus was quoting Scripture from the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 56, which describes people who honor God and serve Him, and the purpose of the temple. This is what is written in Verse 7, "**I will bring these to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; For my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.**"

3) As Jesus was driving the people out of the temple, He accused them of making "**it a den of robbers.**" These words are found in the ancient Book of Jeremiah. In fact, they are a prophecy that Jesus fulfilled by driving the people out of the temple. Here is what is written in Jeremiah, Chapter 7, Verses 11-15, "**Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it", says Yahweh. But go now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I caused my name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. Now, because you have done all these works," says Yahweh, "and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you didn't hear; and I called you, but you didn't answer; therefore I will do to the house which is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave to you, and to your fathers, as I did in Shiloh. I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, even the whole offspring of Ephraim."**

**Special Note Regarding Shiloh and Ephraim:** When the ancient Israelite people first moved into the promised land, they settled in a place known as Shiloh, and there they established the "tent of meeting." This was their place to worship God, where they could experience His presence, and where they kept the ark of the covenant of God (which was the original commandments that God gave to Moses). Earlier in Chapter 10, it was reflected that the promised land was divided into twelve regions. Ephraim was the name of the region where Shiloh was located. The whole northern area, including Ephraim, was made up of ten tribes from the original twelve, and this northern area became known as Israel, but this whole area was sometimes also referred to as Ephraim. Shiloh continued to remain the central place of worship for the Israelite people for several hundred years, until the Israelites turned away from God, rebelled against Him and provoked Him to anger. As a result, God then abandoned Shiloh and it was overtaken and destroyed by the Philistines. This event is recorded in the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 78, Verses 59-61, where it is written "**When God heard this, he was angry, and greatly abhorred Israel; So that he abandoned the tent of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity, his glory into the adversary's hand.**"

Jeremiah's prophecy predicted Jesus casting the people out of the temple in Jerusalem which compares with God's actions of casting out "**the whole offspring of Ephraim**" in Shiloh. As mentioned, Ephraim was a name used to describe the ten tribes of Israel, and in fact, that complete northern area was later conquered by the Assyrians, shortly after the Philistines destroyed Shiloh. This forced those ten Israelite tribes to become dispersed into other nations. These people became known as "The lost tribes of Israel." The original tribe of Ephraim was the offspring of a man named Ephraim, who was the son of Joseph, and grandson of Jacob. As was reflected in the "Historical Background" section of this book, Jacob was the father of the twelve men who made up all twelve tribes of Israel. When Jacob was dying, Joseph brought his son Ephraim to see him and Jacob blessed Ephraim, saying; "**His offspring will become a multitude of Nations.**" This prophecy became true when the Israelite people of Ephraim were dispersed throughout the world, after being conquered by the Assyrians.

4) While in the temple, Jesus healed blind and lame people that came to Him, and all the while, the children surrounding Him were singing praises to Jesus, saying "**Hosanna to the son of David**", which they had probably heard the crowd singing outside earlier. It is written that when the chief priests and scribes saw and heard these wonderful things, they became "**indignant**", meaning angry and upset. They lashed out at Jesus, saying "**Do you hear what these are saying**", which implied that the children's praises were wrong, and that Jesus should make them stop. Jesus responded by saying "**Yes, Did you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing babies you have perfected praise?'**" Here Jesus was referencing the ancient Book of Psalms, in which there are many Chapters written about praising God for His magnificence, wonderful works, almighty and supreme power, righteousness, and His love and mercy for those who love and honor Him. Jesus was

specifically referencing Psalms, Chapter 8, Verses 1-2, where the complete Verses are written as follows "**Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth, who has set your glory above the heavens! From the lips of babes and infants you have established strength, because of your adversaries, that you might silence the enemy and the avenger.**" In referencing these Verses though, Jesus altered "**you have established strength**" to "**you have perfected praise.**" The following reflections can be made from these particular Verses and the text that Jesus changed. I) Jesus used these Verses to respond to the chief priests and scribes' position against His miracles and the praises from the children, in order to refocus their thoughts back to the Book of Psalms, which honors and praises God. II) By doing this, He was implying that they were unable to recognize the works of God, happening right in front of them, and pointing out that they themselves were refusing to offer their own praises to God for His works. Meanwhile, the children had instinctively recognized God's miracles, being performed through Jesus, and they were praising Him for it. III) We are not given a clear explanation as to what Jesus meant by changing the text. However, a review of Jesus' teachings from past Chapters may help to explain His reason behind this. In Chapter 18, Jesus taught to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven people must turn and humble themselves like children. In Chapter 19, Jesus blessed little children who were brought to Him, saying "**the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these.**" The chief priests and scribes did not accept Jesus for who He was, and they refused to acknowledge the miracles that He was performing. By changing the text Jesus may have been suggesting that the children were able to recognize who Jesus was, and offered Him perfect praise, whereas the chief priests and scribes were unable to.

5) It is also important to reflect upon the last part of the Verses that Jesus pointed the chief priests and scribes toward, as it is written "**you have established strength**", but the sentence does not end there, it continues with "**because of your adversaries, that you might silence the enemy and the avenger.**" This section prophetically pointed toward Jesus, because Jesus was opposing His enemies who were objecting to His miracles and the children's praises, and in doing so, Jesus was establishing His "**strength**" against them; and as a result, He was able to "**silence the enemy.**"

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus reminded the people that the temple was meant to be a house of prayer. From this it is clear that the places where God is worshiped must not be violated by: I) Disrespecting the sanctity of these places of worship II) Being hypocritical in service to God III) Using these places for commerce or worldly gain.

2) The negative feelings of the chief priests toward what they witnessed in the temple provides an example of how, even people who hold significant positions of power within institutions of religion can be blind and reject true worship and miracles of God when their own internal beliefs or positions of worldly power and influence are challenged.

3) Jesus' teaching that God perfects His praise through "**babes and nursing babies**" further expands upon His previous teachings about having faith like children, and it provides a good comparison for us to consider as we grow in our faith and knowledge of God. Just as babies rely on their mother's milk to grow from birth, we too rely on Jesus' teachings and God's Word to grow in our knowledge of Him. In fact, there's an ancient Scripture that reflects this point of view. In the ancient Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, Chapter 3, Verses 1-2, the Apostle Paul wrote these words of instruction to new followers of Jesus: "**Brothers, I couldn't speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshly, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with meat; for you weren't yet ready.**" In writing these words, Paul was revealing that when we first start to follow Jesus' teachings we are like "**babes in Christ**", and are not yet ready to receive the full knowledge of God. However, as we seek to grow in our knowledge of God, so grows our ability to understand God's Word, and consequently we are matured in our ability to love and praise Him.

# Faith, God's Will and Belief

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 21, Verses 17-32

17 He left them, and went out of the city to Bethany, and camped there. 18 Now in the morning, as he returned to the city, he was hungry. 19 Seeing a fig tree by the road, he came to it, and found nothing on it but leaves. He said to it, "**Let there be no fruit from you forever!**" Immediately the fig tree withered away. 20 When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree immediately wither away?"

21 Jesus answered them, "**Most certainly I tell you, if you have faith, and don't doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you told this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it would be done. 22 All things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.**"

23 When he had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you this authority?" 24 Jesus answered them, "**I also will ask you one question, which if you tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men?**" They reasoned with themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men', we fear the multitude, for all hold John as a prophet." 27 They answered Jesus, and said, "We don't know." He also said to them, "**Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. 28 But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first, and said, 'Son, go work today in my vineyard.' 29 He answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind, and went. 30 He came to the second, and said the same thing. He answered, 'I'm going, sir,' but he didn't go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?**"

They said to him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "**Most certainly I tell you that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering into God's Kingdom before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn't believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. When you saw it, you didn't even repent afterward, that you might believe him.**"

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 21, Verses 17-32

1) Jesus came across a fig tree that didn't have any fruit on it and said to the tree "**Let there be no fruit from you forever!**" Then the fig tree immediately withered away and died. The disciples marveled at this miracle and questioned Jesus how it could have happened. Jesus responded by reminding them about the power of faith. Jesus explained that through faith they would be able to do the same and, just as He taught them in Chapter 17, He repeated that through the power of faith they could even move mountains. (The reflections on Chapter 17 provide a detailed explanation of having enough faith to move mountains. On this point, Jesus also emphasized that the type of faith that is needed must be complete faith without any

unbelief). In this Chapter, again Jesus reminded them: I) They must have faith II) Their faith must not have any doubt or unbelief in the outcome III) Finally, their acts of faith are accomplished through prayer.

2) When the chief priests & elders asked Jesus "**By what authority do you do these things**" in the temple, He did not answer them directly. Instead, He was able to silence them by asking them where they thought the authority of John's baptizing came from. In doing this, He revealed to them their harmful intentions and their own lack of knowledge. At the same time, He made them aware that both His and John's authority came from God.

3) Regarding the parable of the father and the actions of his two sons, the chief priests and elders answered Jesus' question correctly about which son did his father's will. Jesus then used the example of the first son, who refused to do his father's will and then changed his mind, as a comparison to tax collectors and prostitutes who were living sinful lives but then changed their ways after hearing and believing in John the Baptist's preaching. He then compared the chief priests and elders with the second son, who told his father that he would do his will, but did not, because they did not believe in John's preaching and refused to repent of their own sins. As a result, even though they were the religious leaders of the people, Jesus told them that "**The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering into God's Kingdom before you.**"

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The withering of the fig tree also offers a spiritual lesson for us which aligns with Jesus' teachings from previous Chapters. In Chapter 13, Jesus explained that the parable of the farmer sowing seed was about how people respond when they hear the Word of God. He explained that not everyone will respond in the same way, and that only some will respond fully to the point of bearing fruit. Jesus said, "**What was sown on the good ground, this is he who hears the Word, and understands it, who most certainly bears fruit**", meaning these are the people with fully open hearts, who seek and understand God's Word and as a result "bear fruit". By bearing "fruit", Jesus meant that they live according to God's will and share His Word with others. Therefore, the barren fig tree represents people who do not live according to God's will.

Jesus further explained in Chapter 13 that there will be a "**harvest time**", when there is a separation of those who do God's will from those who do not. Jesus painted a terrifying picture of the "harvest time", when all of those who are unrighteous will be destroyed. Therefore, the destruction of the fig tree also represents the destruction of those who do not live according to God's will.



# Kingdom of Heaven – Parables 3

## Part I

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 21, Verses 33-46

33 **"Hear another parable. There was a man who was a master of a household, who planted a vineyard, set a hedge about it, dug a wine press in it, built a tower, leased it out to farmers, and went into another country. 34 When the season for the fruit came near, he sent his servants to the farmers, to receive his fruit. 35 The farmers took his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they treated them the same way. 37 But afterward he sent to them his son, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But the farmers, when they saw the son, said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and seize his inheritance.' 39 So they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 When therefore the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?"** 41 They told him, "He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will give him the fruit in its season." 42 Jesus said to them, **"Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected was made the head of the corner. This was from the Lord. It is marvelous in our eyes?'** 43 **"Therefore I tell you, God's Kingdom will be taken away from you, and will be given to a nation producing its fruit. 44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but on whomever it will fall, it will scatter him as dust."** 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he spoke about them. 46 When they sought to seize him, they feared the multitudes, because they considered him to be a prophet.

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 21, Verses 33-46

**Special Note:** *In the ancient Book of Psalms, the complete Chapter of 118 is a prophecy of the specific circumstances that surrounded Jesus arrival into Jerusalem, as well as of the events that unfolded afterward. The particular details of these prophecies will be included in the references in this and the upcoming Chapters, as they align and unfold with Jesus' experiences.*

1) Jesus continued speaking to the chief priests and elders, saying **"hear another parable"**, and then began telling the parable of the master's vineyard. Jesus' new parable resembles Scripture found in the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 5, starting from Verse 1. Here are the Verses that the prophet Isaiah wrote, which compare with Jesus' parable **"My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up, gathered out its stones, planted it with the choicest vine, built a tower in the middle of it, and also cut out a wine press therein. He looked for it to yield grapes but it yielded wild grapes. "Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Why, when I looked for it to**



**yield grapes did it yield wild grapes? Now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled down. I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it." For the vineyard of Yahweh of armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness, but, behold, a cry of distress."**

By comparing Isaiah's text with Jesus' parable, the master of the household is God, the vineyard represents the nation of Israel, and its' plants are the people of Israel. In both Jesus' and Isaiah's versions, the master prepared the vineyard extensively to provide everything necessary for the farmers to protect and grow good fruit, which represents how God has protected and provided for the people of Israel, so that they would honor Him, trust in Him and live according to His will. In Isaiah's parable, the vineyard produced wild grapes, meaning that the people of Israel did not always live according to God's will, and God posed the question of what more He could have done so that they would have produced good fruit.

In Isaiah's version, God destroys the vineyard and abandons his care of it. It was laid to waste, to be overrun by thorns. In addition, God withheld the nourishment of rain so that nothing of any goodness could grow there anymore.

Jesus' version expanded on the vineyard and pointed directly toward the farmers tending "the plants" in God's vineyard I) The farmers cultivating the plants represented those in positions of influence, who would teach and lead the people to become good fruit, or faithful people of God. II) The master's servants were the prophets whom God had sent to prophesize God's will to the people of Israel. Just as happened in Jesus parable, many of God's prophets were actually rejected, beaten and killed, with the most recent person being John the Baptist. III) Finally, the master sent his own son, the heir of the vineyard, expecting that the farmers would show him respect. However, instead, they plotted and killed him as well; which represents God's Son, Jesus, who would soon be put to death by the leaders of the people.

After Jesus finished telling His parable, He asked the chief priests and elders **"When therefore the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?"** and they replied that he will **"destroy those miserable men, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will give him the fruit in its season."**

2) Jesus then asked the chief priests and elders if they had ever read in the Scriptures **"The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner. This was from the Lord. It is marvelous in our eyes?"** This Scripture is a prophecy that can be found in the Book of Psalms, Chapter 118. This section of Scripture is actually the second part of the prophecy, as the full prophecy comes from two separate ancient books of Scripture. The first part of the prophecy can be found in the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 28, Verse 16, where it is written **"Thus**

says the Lord Yahweh, **"Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation."** This prophecy is predicted to happen in Zion (Jerusalem), where God's **"precious cornerstone"** will be tried (meaning judged) and as a result, will become the **"cornerstone"** of God's **"sure foundation."** Now when we look at Psalms 118 and include a few verses before and after the verses that Jesus referenced, the rest of the prophecy is revealed. This is what is written in the Book of Psalms, Chapter 118, Verses 20-24 **"This is the gate of Yahweh; the righteous will enter into it. I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me, and have become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is Yahweh's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that Yahweh has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it."** Jesus pointed them toward this Scripture because this was a prophecy about Himself. The first part of the prophecy predicted that Jesus would be the cornerstone. The chief priests, elders and leaders of the people are the builders who reject Him. Yet, it was God's plan that Jesus would be judged in Jerusalem, to become the sure foundation for God's people. The events that are about to unfold in the following Chapters confirm Jesus' destiny to fulfill this prophecy, and although He will experience the worst acts of humanity in the process, the prophecy revealed that **"This is Yahweh's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that Yahweh has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it."** We will reflect in later Chapters why what Jesus was about to experience was something that people will rejoice over and be glad about.

3) Jesus then turned the parable of the vineyard around to reveal that it represented the chief priests themselves, by saying; **"Therefore I tell you, God's Kingdom will be taken away from you, and will be given to a nation producing its fruit."** Meaning that, because they rejected Jesus and would soon put Him to death, to protect their own worldly concerns, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from them and be made available to other people who live according to God's will.

4) Jesus went on to say, **"He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces."** Jesus taught that following Him meant transforming from being focused on the things of this world to seeking the knowledge of God and living according to His will. Jesus now compared this transformation like falling on **"this stone"** of Jesus and being **"broken into pieces"**; the old worldly ways must be broken to allow a new spiritual transformation to happen. However, Jesus next warned **"but on whomever it will fall, it will scatter him as dust."** Jesus also taught about a time of judgment, when there will be separation and destruction of those who do not live according to God's will. Jesus was here comparing this judgment as **"this stone"** of Jesus falling **"on whomever it will fall"**, and as a result He warned **"it will scatter Him like dust"**, meaning they will disappear like dust blowing in the wind, and not partake in the rewards of God's Kingdom.

## Considerations for people seeking to know God

1) The prophecy of Isaiah, Chapter 28, pointed to God setting a precious cornerstone in Jerusalem, that would be the foundation for His people; and Psalms, Chapter 118, revealed that this is the gate of God by which righteous people will enter. These prophecies pointed toward Jesus being the precious stone that the priests and leaders would reject, and yet, in doing so they fulfilled the prophecy. This is extremely significant, because through the prophecy it has been revealed that Jesus is God's sure foundation and that He Himself provides the gateway to God. Therefore, Jesus is the foundation in whom we can put our faith and trust; He is our guide and strength while we seek God and the rewards of His Kingdom.

2) Jesus told the chief priests and Pharisees that **"God's Kingdom will be taken away from you, and will be given to a nation producing its fruit."** This statement revealed that God's Kingdom was no longer solely reserved for the people Israel; and it is now available to all people from all nations. The rejection of Jesus and their lack of "producing good fruit" was the cause of their loss of God's Kingdom. Therefore, God's Kingdom is available to everyone who accepts Jesus and "produces fruit", which means following Jesus' teaching, living according to God's will, and sharing our faith with others. This is the good news that the Kingdom of Heaven is available for everyone through Jesus.

3) The previous consideration (2) reflects what Jesus taught in Chapter 10, Verses 32-33 when He said **"Everyone therefore who confesses me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven."** This means that for everyone who has faith in Jesus and confesses their belief to others, Jesus will also confess before God on their behalf in God's Kingdom. This is also a warning though, for those who deny or reject Jesus to others, as He will also deny and reject them before God. Therefore, confessing our belief in Jesus to others is key to having Him acknowledge and confess our faith in Him before God.

## Part II

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 22, Verses 1-14

1 Jesus answered and spoke to them again in parables, saying, 2 "**The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, 3 and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, 'Behold, I have prepared my dinner. My cattle 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 grabbed his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 When the king heard that, he was angry, and sent his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8 "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited weren't worthy. 9 Go therefore to the intersections of the highways, and as many as you may find, invite to the marriage feast.' 10 Those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good. The wedding was filled with guests. 11 But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who didn't have on wedding clothing, 12 and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here not wearing wedding clothing?' He was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and throw him into the outer darkness. That is where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be.' 14 For many are called, but few chosen."

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 22, Verses 1-14

1) In the first half of this parable, Jesus was pointing toward the history and relationship of God with His chosen people, the Israelites. Jesus said, "**The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast.**" The King is a reference to God, his son represents God's Word, and by extension, God's instructions for living according to His will. The marriage feast is the Kingdom of Heaven, and those invited are God's chosen people. The servants represent the prophets of God, whom He sent out over time, to call His people to follow His Word and live according to God's will. However, the parable revealed "**but they would not come**", meaning that they would not live according to His will. Jesus continued saying "**Again he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, 'Behold, I have prepared my dinner. My cattle and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the marriage feast!'**" This represents the persistence of God reaching out to His people over time, inviting them to respond to His calling to honor Him and live according to His will, so that they may receive their reward which has been prepared for them in Heaven. However, Jesus said that the people "**made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise**", meaning that they rejected the offer and chose to follow their own interests. Then Jesus said that some of the people even "**grabbed his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them**", which again represents the

people's treatment of God's prophets. Next, Jesus said "**When the king heard that, he was angry, and sent his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.**" In the last Chapter, it was reflected how God abandoned His people in Shiloh, for their disobedience to Him, delivering them into the captivity of their enemies, as was written in the Book of Psalms, Chapter 78, Verses 59-61. If we continue in that same Chapter of Psalms, Verses 62-64, it is written that God "**also gave his people over to the sword, and was angry with his inheritance. Fire devoured their young men. Their virgins had no wedding song. Their priests fell by the sword. And their widows couldn't weep**", which aligns with how this new parable described the reaction of the King.

2) In the last half of this parable, Jesus was predicting God's future relationship with all people, beginning from Jesus' time forward. In this half of the parable, Jesus expanded upon the wording of the "marriage feast" to include "the wedding", which is subtle but shifts the focus from the feast to the wedding ceremony itself. Jesus said, "**The wedding is ready, but those who were invited weren't worthy**", which again referred to His chosen people's rejection of God's invitation to honor Him and live according to His will, and because of that they became unworthy to be part of the wedding.

3) Jesus continued His parable teaching that the King said to his servants "**Go therefore to the intersections of the highways, and as many as you may find, invite to the marriage feast.**" This represents God making the Kingdom of Heaven accessible to all people, not only the Israelites, and sending His servants around the world to invite everyone to follow God's Word and live according to His will, so that everyone could partake in the rewards of the Kingdom of Heaven. The parable continued "**Those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good. The wedding feast was filled with guests.**" Just as Jesus predicted in this parable, Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven and God's Word did begin to spread around the world through the efforts of God's "**servants**", starting with Jesus' disciples, the Apostle Paul (who was discussed in Chapter 14), and the early followers of Jesus' teachings. From that time forward, despite constant resistance from various sources, Jesus' teachings and God's Word continued to spread around the world, to all nations and people, and continues to spread today.

4) The parable does not end here though. Jesus continued "**But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who didn't have on wedding clothing, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here not wearing wedding clothing?'**" Here the King called the man "**friend**" but then questioned how he came in not wearing wedding clothing. This is significant, because he was not asking "how he got in there", he was questioning why he was not dressed appropriately. Therefore, this means that all people are welcomed and invited into God's Kingdom. However, people must be prepared when they arrive into the Kingdom of Heaven, so that they may be accepted by God.

5) Jesus continued the parable, saying that the man "**was speechless**", meaning that he had no excuse or could not account for himself. And, as a result "**Then the king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and throw him into the outer darkness. That is where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be."**" In previous Chapters, we have reflected about a time when those who live according to God's will, will be separated from those who do not. This last section of the parable expands further on this time. The parable mentioned that the servants gathered "**both bad and good**", meaning that God's Word was, and still is, being shared with all people, but the Kingdom of Heaven does not belong to everyone. It remains a place for those who have lived according to God's will. Therefore, the man without wedding clothes represents people who hear God's Word but do not live according to His will.

6) Once again, Jesus painted a horrific picture of the destiny awaiting the rejected guest of the feast. He was thrown "**into outer darkness**", and Jesus repeated the descriptive words that He used before in previous Chapters about this place, saying that it is "**where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be.**" To bring everything into perspective, it may be helpful to refer back to the two other occasions when Jesus used similar descriptive words. I) Jesus was first quoted saying these words in Chapter 8, when He compared the great faith of the Roman centurion with the lack of faith that He had found in others. Jesus said "**Most certainly I tell you, I haven't found so great a faith, not even in Israel. I tell you that many will come from the east and the west, and will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the children of the Kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**" In this instance, Jesus was predicting that many different people, from all over the world, would be accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven for their faith in Him. However, some of those who considered themselves to be God's children, would enter into Heaven but then would be rejected because of their lack of faith and belief in Jesus. This aligns with the parable in this Chapter where the Kingdom of Heaven is being open and available to all people around the world; and the King rejecting the unprepared invited guest from the feast. II) The second time that Jesus used similar descriptive words was in Chapter 13. Jesus told a parable about evil darnel weed seeds being sown and grown together with good wheat seeds, until a time of harvest. This aligns with the King's servants inviting "**both good and bad**" guests to the feast. In the weeds parable, Jesus said this about the harvest time "**the darnel weeds are gathered up and burned with fire; so will it be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and those who do iniquity, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth.**" In previous Chapters, we've reflected that "**stumbling**" means to lose faith and belief in Jesus and God, and to "**do iniquity**" is to live sinfully, against God's will. In that parable, Jesus said that those people would be cast into the furnace of fire. In previous Chapters Jesus spoke about the fires of Gehenna, and the reflections of Chapter 5 explained that this represents the wrath of God, who is able to destroy both body and soul; therefore, "**the furnace of fire**" also represented the wrath of



God. Again, Jesus used those similar, familiar descriptive words about this place where **"there will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth."**

In this Chapter, Jesus used **"the outer darkness"** where **"the weeping and grinding of teeth will be"** to describe the destiny that awaited the invited guest, who was unprepared and unaccountable for himself at the wedding feast. Therefore, if we reflect on all three situations where Jesus used this descriptive text in relation to entering into the Kingdom of Heaven, God then requires people: I) To have faith and belief in Jesus II) To have faith that won't be shaken or lost, while living a life that is not sinful III) And finally, to be prepared and accountable before God, in His presence.

7) Once again, Jesus completed this parable by saying **"For many are called, but few chosen."** As was the case in Chapter 20, when Jesus said, **"the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few are chosen"**, this statement remains about God calling people to seek Him and live according to His will. The words **"but few are chosen"** are not meant to imply rejection, but rather, refer to God choosing and accepting all people who do His will.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus taught this parable and the vineyard parable in the previous Chapter, shortly before His death, to ensure that these messages about the Kingdom of Heaven were revealed. In doing so, He shared the good news that the Kingdom of Heaven is available to everyone who believes in Him, seeks to know God, and lives according to His will.

2) In this parable, Jesus foretold that the Word of God would be spread all over the world through God's servants. As mentioned in previous reflections, through the persistent efforts of Jesus' disciples, the Apostle Paul, and Jesus' early followers, God's Word did begin to spread; and it continues to spread around the world today through those who follow Jesus and share God's Word with others. The fact that this indeed has come true, just as Jesus predicted approximately 2000 years ago, reveals the divine holiness of Jesus' words and the certainty of the promises that are contained in His teachings. During those early days, the Apostle Paul wrote several letters of instruction, which he gave to the early followers of Jesus, to help strengthen their faith and guide them as they spread God's Word. These letters are still available today, and they make up a large portion of what is known as the "Books of the New Testament." It is very important, for people seeking to know God, to read these Books of instruction because what Paul wrote back then, remains constant, extremely relevant, and is still applicable for us today.

The history of the Apostle Paul was included in Chapter 14, but it is repeated here again for reference:

In the early days when the followers of Jesus were beginning to share and spread His teachings, there lived a man named Saul who persecuted them and imprisoned

many who believed in Jesus. While on his way toward a city named Damascus, to find and imprison more of Jesus' followers, Jesus appeared to Saul and said, "**why do you persecute me?**" Jesus then caused Saul's eyes to be blinded for three days. While Saul was blind in Damascus, a follower of Jesus named Ananias had a vision from God. God told Ananias to go to Saul and lay his hands on him to restore Saul's sight. Ananias was afraid to go because he knew that Saul was in Damascus for the sole purpose of capturing and imprisoning Jesus' followers. God then told Ananias "**Go your way, for he is my chosen vessel to bear my name before the nations and kings, and the children of Israel.**" Ananias went and met with Saul, he touched him, and immediately Saul's eyes were no longer blind. From that point on, Saul became a dedicated follower of Jesus. Saul later became known as Paul, and just as God told Ananias, Paul did become God's primary vessel or instrument for spreading God's Word. He traveled to many foreign countries, sharing the message and teachings of Jesus. Paul himself also performed many miracles in God's name. As mentioned, the majority of the ancient Books that are found in the New Testament were written by Paul himself.

3) In this Chapter, we reflected that the Book of Psalms, Chapter 78 Verses 62- 64, completed the picture of when God abandoned the people of Israel at Shiloh. However, if we still continue on in Psalms Chapter 78, Verses 65 to the end of that Chapter, it is written that God "**awakened as one out of sleep, like a mighty man who shouts by reason of wine. He struck his adversaries backward. He put them to a perpetual reproach. Moreover he rejected the tent of Joseph, and didn't choose the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which he loved. He built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which he has established forever. He also chose David his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that have their young, he brought him to be the shepherd of Jacob, his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he was their shepherd according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his Hands.**" This final section of Psalms 78 revealed that God returned to "**His people**" to provide their promised inheritance through David, who would shepherd them by the integrity of his heart. Therefore, from that point forward the inheritance of God's people comes by the integrity of their hearts, through faith and belief in God, as demonstrated by David. This also prophetically pointed toward Jesus, because Jesus was a direct descendant from the line of King David, and we will reflect in later Chapters how Jesus becomes the shepherd for God's people, by the integrity of their hearts, through their faith and belief in Him.

5) Knowing that people can be either accepted or rejected from the Kingdom of Heaven offers a promise of great hope, but at the same time a warning of impending doom. We can be joyful about the good news that the Kingdom of Heaven is available to everyone, through belief in Jesus and living according to God's will. However, Jesus has also provided a grave warning about the hopeless and desperate situation facing those who have not prepared to be accountable before God, in His presence.



# Testing Jesus

## Part I

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 22, Verses 15-32

5 Then the Pharisees went and took counsel how they might entrap him in his talk. 16 They sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are honest, and teach the way of God in truth, no matter whom you teach, for you aren't partial to anyone. 17 Tell us therefore, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" 18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "**Why do you test me, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the tax money.**" They brought to him a denarius. 20 He asked them, "**Whose is this image and inscription?**" 21 They said to him, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "**Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.**" 22 When they heard it, they marveled, and left him, and went away.

23 On that day Sadducees (those who say that there is no resurrection) came to him. They asked him, 24 saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up offspring for his brother.' 25 Now there were with us seven brothers. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. 26 In the same way, the second also, and the third, to the seventh. 27 After them all, the woman died. 28 In the resurrection therefore, whose wife will she be of the seven? For they all had her." 29 But Jesus answered them, "**You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like God's angels in heaven. 31 But concerning the resurrection of the dead, haven't you read that which was spoken to 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.**"

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 22, Verses 15-32

1) It is written that the Pharisees "**took counsel how they might entrap him in his talk.**" Meaning that they met together to find a way to trap Jesus, by accusing Him for something that He might say, so that He could be arrested. It is written that they sent their own disciples to pose a question to Jesus, together with the "**Herodians.**" The Herodians would most likely have been a group of people who were loyal to King Herod and supported the ruling power of the Romans.

2) The point of their question was whether or not it was right for the Israelite people to pay taxes to Caesar; which was a forced Roman law. This double-edged sword of a question could either: I) Turn people against Jesus, if He had said that it was their duty to pay taxes to Caesar, or II) Frame Jesus as a person against Roman rule, if He said that they should not pay taxes to Caesar.

It is written that Jesus recognized their wicked intentions and before responding to their trick question, He asked them "**Why do you test me, you hypocrites.**" Jesus

accused them of being hypocrites because before they posed their question, they framed it by saying that Jesus taught **"the way of God in truth."** Therefore, this implied that they were looking to learn a lesson from Jesus, when in fact, they were looking to trap Jesus by His response.

3) Jesus does answer their question in accordance with God's truth and does so in a way that honored both God and Caesar. It is written that His answer **"marveled"** them, meaning that it left them in awe and surprised wonder. And so, they left Him without achieving their intended result.

4) The Sadducees were a religious Jewish group who associated themselves with the Pharisees and upper Jewish society. They did not, however, believe in the **"resurrection"** which the Pharisees did believe in and taught about. The Pharisees taught that the "resurrection" was a time when the dead would be brought back to life to live again on earth, beginning around the arrival time of their Messiah (the anointed one). The origin of their **"resurrection"** teachings were drawn from various Verses found in several Books of ancient Scripture. The Sadducees, however, only followed five specific Books of ancient Scripture, which did not include many of the Verses that the Pharisees used for their resurrection teachings. We will reflect more about the resurrection in later Chapters.

The question that the Sadducees presented to Jesus was specifically related to the resurrection, and so, they were trying to present an impossible situation that would undermine the resurrection teachings. The question they posed concerned a woman who had married several brothers, one after each other had died, and they wanted Jesus to explain to whom the woman would become the wife in **"the resurrection."** Jesus responded with a complex reply saying **"You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like God's angels in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, haven't you read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, 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."** To understand Jesus' response, we'll break it down further as it relates to the resurrection. I) Jesus confirmed that the resurrection does exist, by stating that the institution of marriage between people does not exist in the time of the resurrection, which also meant that the Sadducees question was irrelevant. Jesus also corrected their interpretation that the resurrection is a **"resurrection of the dead"** by revealing that **"God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."** II) Jesus would have known that the Sadducees only studied five books of Scripture, and so in saying that they did not know the Scriptures, He was accusing them of not having a full understanding of all the Scriptures nor the power of God. To support this, He pointed the Sadducees back to the Scriptures that they would have studied, by saying **"haven't you read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?"** This specific scripture can be found in the ancient Book of Exodus. God said these words to Moses just before telling him to go into Egypt, and lead God's people out of slavery, and into the land which God had promised to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Here is what God said to

Moses in Exodus, Chapter 3, Verse 5-8 **"He said, "Don't come close. Take off your sandals, for the place you are standing on is holy ground. "Moreover he said, "I am the God of your father; the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look at God. Yahweh said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey; to the place of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite."** In Chapter 6 of the same Book of Exodus, it is also written **"God spoke to Moses, and said to him, "I am Yahweh; and I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God almighty; but by my name Yahweh I was not known to them. I have also established my covenant with them" ... "Moreover I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore tell the children of Israel, 'I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments: and I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God; and you shall know that I am Yahweh your God, who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."** These Scriptures document God's history of communicating and interacting with His people in a physical way, and how He used His power to act on their behalf to save them from their bondage.

III) So how do these Scriptures and Jesus' response tie into the resurrection? Jesus was teaching the Sadducees that there is a resurrection, and that in the resurrection, God's people will live together in harmony with Him. In the ancient Scriptures, God's power was demonstrated through the miracles and plagues which He inflicted upon the Egyptians to free His people from the bondage of slavery. As a result of God's power, Moses was able to lead God's people out of Egypt and into the promised land. In the same way, Jesus has been teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven where the bondage of death is overcome by everlasting life, once again through the power of God. Jesus was revealing that **"the resurrection"** is eternal life in God's new promised land of Heaven, where His people will be released from the bondage of death into everlasting life, as led by Jesus. Therefore, in both cases, God is a living force working in the lives of people and remains a God of the living - not a God of the dead!

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus' reply to the Pharisees' disciples and the Herodian's trick question reveals the infinite wisdom of God, as spoken through Jesus, and that the plans and efforts of humanity can never deceive God.

2) Jesus' response teaches that, in some cases, it is possible for people to honor their duty toward authorities on earth without being in conflict with God. However, the main priority should always be to honor God first.

3) In responding to the Sadducees question, Jesus gave us some insight into the nature of the relationship between God and His people in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus explained that people do not marry each other in Heaven, but rather, people become like "**God's angels**", implying that marriage will be replaced by a personal relationship with God. It is also interesting to note that in this Chapter's parable, Jesus compared the Kingdom of Heaven with a wedding feast, where God is united with His people. Therefore, the resurrection will be a time when God and His people are united in the Kingdom of Heaven, to experience a special relationship together in eternal life.

4) Jesus' teaching, that "**God is not the God of the dead, but of the living**", is very important to understand, because God is not some distant entity somewhere out there in the universe who cannot have a personal connection with us in our daily lives. In fact, just the opposite is true! God is a real, tangible force who can work in every person's life. God wants us to come to Him in order to have a personal relationship with Him, which can be accomplished through faith, belief, a willingness to seek after Him, and by keeping our hearts open to receive from Him.

## Part II

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 22, Verses 33-40

33 When the multitudes heard it, they were astonished at his teaching. 34 But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him. 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, "**'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'** 38 **This is the first and great commandment.** 39 **A second likewise is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'** 40 **The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.**"

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 22, Verses 33-40

1) The Pharisees, being disappointed in the efforts of the Sadducees, continued to conspire together and pressed Jesus with another question to test Him, asking "**Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law.**" In Chapter 5, the meaning of "**the law**" was reflected upon when Jesus said that He did not come "**to destroy the law or the prophets.**" Jesus was referring to two of the three sections that make up the ancient Hebrew Scriptures known as the TANAKH (which is the Hebrew Acronym for the 3 separate sections). The TANAKH sections are: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, and each section is made up of a number of Books. The Books of "the Law" were commandments that God gave to Moses, who wrote them down to instruct people about how to live according to God's will. The Books of "the Law" contain several hundred commandments, including the 10 commandments discussed in Chapter 4, and the Pharisees were asking Jesus which commandment was the most important from all of the commandments written in the Books of the Law. Jesus answered, "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**" This particular commandment is found in the ancient Book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 6, Verse 5, where it is written "**You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.**" Notice that Jesus changed "**might**" to "**mind.**" We aren't given a clear answer as to why Jesus changed this terminology. However, if we refer to previous Chapters, this change does align with Jesus' teachings about: I) Seeking to know God II) Living consciously according to God's will, and III) Having an unwavering faith in God without any doubt. The words "**all your might**" imply "all your strength" although "might" represents the fullness of a person's "vital forces", which includes the mind. In the ancient Book of Mark, Jesus is recorded as responding to this same question by saying; "**you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.**" In this case "might" is replaced with both "mind" and "strength", to emphasize a clear distinction between a person's mind and their strength. In any case, this commandment is specifically about loving God and how to love God. Therefore, it is important to realize that loving God is the central focus of the commandment. Loving God with all your heart is emotional love, loving God with all your soul is deep internal core love, and finally, loving God with your all mind is intentional mindful love.

2) Without being pressed further, Jesus offered the Pharisees the second greatest commandment, saying "**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**" This commandment is found in the ancient Book of Leviticus, Chapter 19, Verse 18. This commandment, however, creates the question of: "who should people consider to be their neighbors?" Jesus answered that question in the ancient Book of Luke, Chapter 10, Verse 19, when another lawyer tested Him, asking Him exactly that question, saying "**Who is my neighbor?**" Jesus responded by telling a parable about a man who was beaten, robbed and left to die on the road side. Two men, on two separate occasions, walked by and saw the man lying there. They both ignored the man's circumstance and continued to walk on past him. Another man came along, and seeing what had happened, showed compassion, stopped, and helped the injured man. Jesus then asked the lawyer "**Now which of these three do you think seemed to be a neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?**" The lawyer responded "**He who showed mercy on him**", to which Jesus replied; "**Go and do likewise.**" Therefore, this teaching of Jesus in the Book of Luke revealed that our "**neighbor**" is all people, which includes strangers.

3) Jesus completed His response, by saying "**The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.**" As discussed in Chapter 5, the Books of "the Law" and "the Prophets" instructed people how to live according to God's will. Although these Books provide great detail, and very specific teachings, what Jesus was saying was that loving God and loving your fellow man is the central core teaching found in all the writings of the Law and the Prophets. Therefore, this is the primary message to be learned and practiced from those Books and it is also a foundational principle of Jesus' own teachings.

## **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Loving God with all our mind, requires keeping our minds centered on God in all things that we do, focusing on the will of God, and applying that in our daily lives.

2) Further to the reflections on loving God with all our mind, God calls us to seek after Him. Therefore, to love God with all our mind also means to love the knowledge of Him that He reveals to us through Jesus' teachings, the writings of his early followers, and God's Word found in the ancient Scriptures.

3) In addition to the most important commandment to love God, Jesus provided the second most important as well, which is to love our neighbors as ourselves. In the parable of the injured man, the good neighbor demonstrated his love to a stranger through his actions, and Jesus taught that the term "neighbor" does not only mean the person living next door to us, it means all humanity. Therefore, to love God and to show compassionate love to all people, is doing God's will at the highest level.

# Jesus Tests the Pharisees

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 22, Verses 41-46

41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, 42 saying, "**What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?**" They said to him, "Of David." 43 He said to them, "**How then does David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, 44 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?' 45 'If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?'**" 46 No one was able to answer him a word, neither did any man dare ask him any more questions from that day forward.

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 22, Verses 41-46

1) Jesus appeared to be asking a straightforward question to the Pharisees, when He said "**What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?**", to which they responded without hesitation, saying "**Of David.**" In the first Chapter of this book it was described that "Christ" was a Greek word for the Hebrew word "Messiah" which when translated means "Anointed One." The Israelites believed that the Messiah would be an expected king or high priest leader who was anointed by God, and physically descended from the line of David. Therefore, the Pharisees' response was based on one of the foundations of their beliefs, that the Christ would be someone who would be a descendant of King David.

The very first sentence in this Book of Matthew starts with "**The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham...**", and so according to this genealogy, it has been recorded that Jesus was descended from King David, and by extension, descended from Abraham too. In Chapter 16, Jesus asked His disciples "**Who do you say that I am?**" Peter answered, saying "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God**", to which Jesus told Peter that this knowledge had been revealed to him from "**my Father who is in heaven.**" In the ancient Book of Luke, Chapter 9, Verse 20, Peter is recorded as answering this same question by simply saying "**The Christ of God**" and in the ancient Book of Mark, Chapter 8, Verse 29, Peter is recorded as answering "**You are the Christ.**" Finally, in the ancient Book of John, Chapter 7, Verses 40-42, Jesus was teaching the people in the temple, and after He had finished speaking, the people talked amongst themselves saying, "**This is the Christ.**" **But some said, "What, does the Christ come out of Galilee? Hasn't the Scripture said that the Christ comes of the offspring of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?"** Little did those people realize that their comments did in fact apply to Jesus, because He was born in Bethlehem.

2) Jesus then posed another question to the Pharisees, saying "**How then does David, in the spirit call him, Lord, saying 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?'**" Here Jesus was quoting from the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 110, Verse 1. The ancient Book of Psalms is a collection of writings from several authors, and this particular Chapter of



the Psalms was written by King David. Jesus further qualified His question, by specifically saying "**If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?**" Jesus appeared to be putting a spin on their beliefs by posing this puzzling question. Through this question Jesus was able to make the Pharisees aware of their own lack of knowledge about the true and full nature of their Messiah. As a result, it is recorded that "**No one was able to answer him a word.**"

Although the Pharisees were correct in their response to Jesus' first question about the Christ being a descendent of David, Jesus would not explain the answer to His second question, because they would not have understood it, nor would they have believed Him; and He knew that it wasn't the right time for Him to speak openly about the true nature of Himself either. The answer is very clear and obvious to us now though, knowing that Jesus is the Son of David's bloodline as a man, but He is also David's Lord because He is the Son of God. And, although they thought the Christ would be a King who would come to lead their people on earth, they didn't realize that the Christ would be a King who would come to lead people into God's Kingdom.

It is also important to note that Jesus' question included "**How then does David, in the spirit call him, Lord.**" In saying this, Jesus revealed that the Holy Spirit was upon David when he wrote Psalms 110. There are many instances in the ancient Scriptures which detail the Holy Spirit being upon God's people. We will reflect further on Jesus' teachings about the Holy Spirit in later Chapters.

3) There is one other very significant point that must not be overlooked in these questions that Jesus posed to the Pharisees. His overall point was to bring light upon who "the Christ" is, and His puzzling question pointed the Pharisees toward the Book of Psalms, Chapter 110. Psalms 110 is a prophecy about the Christ, and the harvest time that Jesus so often warned about. In this Chapter of the Psalms, there is a particular Verse written about who the Christ is. It states: "**You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.**" This is a specific description of the Christ found within the very same Chapter of the Psalms that Jesus pointed the Pharisees toward.

### **Who was Melchizedek?**

Once again, if we refer to the "Historical Background" section of this book, the history of Abraham was described as written in the ancient Book of Genesis. In Chapter 12 of the Book of Genesis, it is written that God spoke to Abraham, saying "**I will bless you and make your name great.**" Two Chapters later, it is written that Abraham learned that his relative, Lot, had been captured and was being held captive by Kings who were warring against each other in the land where Lot lived. Abraham gathered a group of men together and went into that land to rescue his relative. It is written that Abraham "**brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative, Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the other people.**" Upon his return, it continues that "**Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine: and he was priest of God Most High. He blessed him, and said "blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth."** So,



Melchizedek was the King of Salem and priest of God Most High, who blessed Abraham. In Chapter 21 of this Book, we reflected that "**Salem**" described the location where the tabernacle of God is, which was God's dwelling place in Zion. With this information, we can now interpret what David meant about "the Christ" when he wrote that He is "**a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek**"; according to this nature and description of Melchizedek, "The Christ" is priest of God Most High and King of God's dwelling place.

Throughout this Book of Matthew, Jesus referred to Himself as the "Son of Man", which reveals His human nature, having been physically born of Mary. Therefore, Jesus is: "Son of Abraham, "Son of David", "Son of Man", "Christ the Messiah (the anointed one)" "Son of God", and now it is revealed that He is also the priest of God Most High, and the King of God's dwelling place!

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Being the priest of God Most High and King of God's dwelling place reveals the incredible significance of who Jesus really is and puts everything about Him into perspective. Jesus' followers can therefore honor Him in loyal obedience, by following His teachings which lead into God's Kingdom.

2) Jesus "the Christ" was foretold to be "**a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek**" in Psalms 110; and there is another comparison with Melchizedek which relates to "the Christ" that will be reflected upon in a future Chapter.

# Scribes and Pharisees verses The Christ

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 23, Verses 1-12

1 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples, 2 saying, "**The scribes and the Pharisees sat on Moses' seat. 3 All things therefore whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do, but don't do their works; for they say, and don't do. 4 For they bind heavy burdens that are grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them. 5 But they do all their works to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad, enlarge the fringes of their garments, 6 and love the place of honor at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi, Rabbi' by men. 8 But don't you be called 'Rabbi,' for one is your teacher, the Christ, and all of you are brothers. 9 Call no man on the earth your father, for one is your Father, he who is in heaven. 10 Neither be called masters, for one is your master, the Christ. 11 But he who is greatest among you will be your servant. 12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.**"

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 23, Verses 1-12

*Special Note: This Chapter begins by indicating that Jesus was speaking to both the multitudes and His disciples at the same time.*

1) Jesus started by advising them to listen and do what the scribes and Pharisees teach, because He said that they "**sat on Moses' seat.**" It has been reflected how Moses provided the people of Israel with laws to live by, and that those laws were provided to him by God. Therefore, Jesus was acknowledging the importance of those laws and the role that the scribes and Pharisees played as teachers of those laws. He told them "**All things therefore whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do**", so that the people listening would understand that their teachings were not wrong, and that it was important to follow and observe their teachings. Jesus then warned them though against acting in the same manner as the scribes and Pharisees did, saying "**but don't do their works; for they say, and don't do.**" Jesus then began to provide examples of their works to expand on His point.

2) Jesus first revealed that the scribes and Pharisees placed high expectations upon people, based on God's laws, and yet, He said "**but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them.**" Meaning, that they would not teach the people how to endure and overcome the challenges that came with observing God's laws. In addition to that, in saying "**for they say, and don't do**", Jesus revealed that, although they were teachers of the law, they themselves did not practice what they taught.

3) Next, Jesus accused the actions of the scribes and Pharisees as being driven by pride and vanity. Jesus pointed out how they took pleasure in being respected for their status in the community, their outward appearances, their preferred positions

at feasts and in the places of worship, and to be "**called Rabbi, Rabbi by men.**" (The word "Rabbi" refers to an ordained teacher of the law and the title comes from the Hebrew word "Rabi" which means "my master." The Hebrew word for "master" is "rav", which can also mean "great one").

4) Jesus then warned the people, saying "**But don't you be called Rabbi, for one is your teacher, the Christ, and all of you are brothers**" and "**Neither be called masters, for one is your master, the Christ.**" These teachings reflect what Jesus taught in Chapter 10, where He said "**A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his lord.**" Jesus, the teacher and servant of God, was explaining that people are not meant to rise one above another, and that no one is greater than God. Jesus was expanding here upon that teaching from Chapter 10, by stating that all people have only one teacher and master, and He is "**the Christ.**" These statements may have been confusing for some hearing these words, because they may not have realized that "**the Christ**", was the person speaking to them, and therefore they may not have understood that Jesus was referring to Himself. However, this statement may have become clear to them after they witnessed the events that were about to unfold over the days that followed. Those events will be reflected upon in upcoming Chapters.

5) Jesus said, "**Call no man on the earth your father, for one is your Father, he who is in Heaven.**" This sounds as though Jesus was condemning people for using the term "father" when referring to their earthly parents. However, if we refer to Chapter 15, it is written how Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of disobeying God's commandment to honor fathers and mothers. Therefore, this could not have been what Jesus was implying in this Chapter. Jesus spoke these words within His comments about the equality of all men, including teachers and masters, and so we must interpret this statement within that same context. Jesus was speaking about their "Father" God in Heaven, and just as people must not consider themselves to be better than each other, no one is greater than God in Heaven, nor deserves higher honor than He does.

6) Then Jesus said, "**But he who is greatest among you will be your servant.**" This comment mirrors the instruction that Jesus gave to His disciples in Chapter 20, Verse 26, when He said, "**But whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.**" In this instance though, Jesus was continuing His teaching about the Christ as the only teacher and master, and was therefore specifically referring to Himself, when He said "**But He who is greatest among you**", and then He completed the sentence with "**will be your servant.**" If we combine this statement with His purpose as teacher and master, Jesus was revealing that He was to be a servant to all people to teach them how to live according to God's will and to prepare them for acceptance into the Kingdom of Heaven. There is another prophecy that Jesus will later fulfill, to be the servant for many people, which will be reflected upon in a future Chapter.

7) In previous Chapters, Jesus taught about the importance of being humble, and that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who humble themselves like little children. Jesus was now further expanding upon this teaching when he said, **"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."** This teaching focuses on how a person perceives and expresses themselves. This is a warning against pride and vanity, and how it will impact a person's circumstance in the Kingdom of Heaven. More specifically, by using the terms **"will be"** Jesus was pointing toward the time of judgment where pride and vanity will be **"humbled"**, and humility will be **"exalted."**

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) By telling both the multitude and His disciples to **"observe and do"** the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus revealed that it is important to learn and follow the commandments of God, as written by Moses. These commandments are still available today in a Book known as the Old Testament. The Old Testament is a single Book that contains a collection of Books of ancient Scripture, some of which are the Books written by Moses which include those ancient commandments.

2) Jesus warned against acting like the scribes and Pharisees who loved receiving glory and honor from others. This teaches to beware of pride and vanity, and instead, to be humble and give honor to God for all that we receive. In addition, when we hear God's Word being preached by those who don't practice what they preach, we can still listen and practice the truths that they teach, regardless of whether or not they follow or practice what they preach.

3) By combining the teaching of **"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his lord"** with the teaching of **"Don't you be called Rabbi, for one is your teacher, the Christ, and all of you are brothers"**, Jesus was showing the importance of being humble when sharing His teachings and God's Word with others. All people are equal, and no-one is above another. Therefore, it is enough for us to share Jesus' teachings and God's Word in a humble welcoming way, rather than thinking of ourselves as being above others for our understanding of God's Word. We are all equal brothers and sisters, with only one master, Jesus, and one Father, God in Heaven.

Jesus taught that He is our only teacher and master, and as followers of His teachings we can be like Him but are not above Him. In the same way, Jesus is God's servant for all humanity, and is therefore like God but not above God. In the very first Chapter of the ancient Book of Genesis, Verse 26, it is written that **"God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:'"**, and in Genesis, Verse 27, it is written **"God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them."** These ancient Verses mirror these teachings of Jesus, in that all people are created in God's likeness, but no-one is greater than God.

4) Jesus came to be a servant for all humanity, to teach us how to be accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven. Understanding the depth of this can provide us with great joy and encouragement to study and follow His teachings.

# Warning the Scribes and Pharisees

## Part I

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 23, Verses 13-22

**13 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and as a pretense you make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.**

**14 But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for you don't enter in yourselves, neither do you allow those who are entering in to enter.**

**15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel around by sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of Gehenna as yourselves.**

**16 Woe to you, you blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.' 17 You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 18 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obligated?' 19 You blind fools! For which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift? 20 He therefore who swears by the altar, swears by it, and by everything on it. 21 He who swears by the temple, swears by it, and by him who has been living in it. 22 He who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by him who sits on it.**

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 23, Verses 13-22

In this next section of this Chapter, Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of several offenses, and called them hypocrites because they weren't practicing what they preached or living according to God's will. In each case, Jesus used the term "**Woe to you**" The word "woe" represents great sorrow, distress, despair and misfortune. Therefore, Jesus was predicting that the scribes and Pharisees would one day face a circumstance of "woe" because of their actions. Jesus was publicly criticizing and accusing the scribes and Pharisees because He wanted the people to realize who they really were. The following reflections are provided to help understand the accusations that Jesus was making.

1) Chapter 26 of the ancient Book of Deuteronomy revisits how God brought His people out of Egypt and into a land flowing with milk and honey. In that Chapter, God commanded His people to rejoice because of the goods that He had provided for them, and then He commanded that they share their abundance with others. In Verse 12 of that Chapter, regarding the people's abundance, it is written "**then you shall give it to the Levite, to the foreigner, to the fatherless, and to the widow, that they may eat within your gates, and be filled.**" Later in Verse 16, it is written "**Today Yahweh your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances. You shall therefore keep and do them with all your heart and with all your soul.**" In complete contrast to this commandment, Jesus was pointing out that the

scribes and Pharisees "**devour widows' houses**" which implied that they were taking advantage of women who had lost their husbands, and He said, "**as a pretense you make long prayers**", meaning that they made a display of long prayers in order to appear good before people and compensate for their actions. As a result, Jesus said "**Therefore you will receive greater condemnation**", meaning that they will be judged more harshly because of their actions.

2) Next, Jesus said that they "**shut up the Kingdom of Heaven before men.**" This implied that they were blocking people from entering into the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus reasoned "**you don't enter in yourselves**" because they were not living according to God's will, and as a result, He said "**neither do you allow those who are entering in to enter**", meaning that people who might have entered into Heaven would not enter because they had been influenced by the scribes' and Pharisees' actions and lived their lives in similar ways.

3) Jesus said, "**For you travel around by sea and land to make one proselyte.**" The term "**Proselyte**" means disciple. Jesus was pointing out that they made great efforts to find and make new disciples, and yet because of their lifestyles, they were making their disciples into "**twice as much a son of Gehenna**" as themselves. In the reflections of Chapter 4, it was explained that Gehenna was a place where people had turned away from God's commandments and practiced sinful rituals. We also reflected on a prophecy, found in the ancient Book of Jeremiah, where God's judgement and wrath would be poured out upon Gehenna, because of those people's actions, and their turning away from God's commandments. Therefore, by once again using "Gehenna" in His accusations, Jesus was pointing directly toward Jeremiah's ancient prophecy of God's wrath, to expose the fate of the scribes, the Pharisees, and their disciples, because they were all living sinfully and not following God's commandments.

4) Jesus started the next "woe" by calling them "blind guides", meaning they were blind to the truth of Jesus' teachings and God's Word, and were therefore blindly guiding people along the wrong path. Jesus began to accuse them of making people feel obligated to their promised contributions of gold to the temple, but not accountable for promises they made to God. To "swear by" means to make a promise or oath, and Jesus accused them of telling the people '**Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated**'. Jesus then continued to accuse them of not knowing "**which is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold.**" The temple was the holiest sanctuary of God and the altar was a place to honor God within the temple. The gold and gifts were the "corban gifts" that people gave to be dedicated to God (as explained in Chapter 15). However, these gifts themselves were nothing without the divinity of the temple and the altar to sanctify them, just as Jesus pointed out. Jesus then said, "**He who swears by the temple, swears by it, and by him who has been living in it**"; and He then expanded upon that statement, saying "**He who swears by Heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by him who sits on it.**" Therefore, to make a promise by the temple, or alter within the temple, was to make

a promise to God Himself. Jesus was expanding upon the accusation that He made against the Pharisees and scribes in Chapter 15, where they placed the tradition of giving corban gifts as being more important than keeping God's commandment of honoring a person's mother & father. Jesus was now adding that the Pharisees and scribes were placing people under obligation to honor their promises to give "corban gifts" but telling them that their promises made to God meant nothing. In the ancient Book of Numbers, Chapter 30, Verses 1-2, it is written **"This is the thing which Yahweh has commanded. When a man vows a vow to Yahweh, or swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."**

In placing the importance of honoring corban gifts above promises made to God, the Pharisees and scribes were valuing commitments toward things of this world above vows made to God. In addition to that, they were also undermining God's commandment written in the ancient Book of Numbers, Chapter 30, Verses 1-2, noted above.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The Verses of Scripture from Deuteronomy, Chapter 26, reveal that having abundance in our lives is a blessing from God, and we can honor Him for that by willingly sharing with others with all our heart and soul. The examples from the Scripture of who to share with include: I) **"the Levite"** – which refers to those who teach God's Word. II) **"the foreigner"**– which refers to our fellowman. III) **the fatherless and the widow** – which refers to those who are less fortunate than ourselves.

2) The accusation that the scribes' and Pharisees' behavior was influencing and altering the eternal destiny of others teaches that the lifestyles we live can have a profound impact and influence on people around us. Therefore, living a life according to God's will not only benefits ourselves but also provides an example for others to follow.

3) The Pharisees and scribes were placing the "things of this world" above honoring God. In the same way, temptations in our daily lives and following cultural practices can also attract us toward the "things of this world" and distract us away from seeking to honor God and His Heavenly Kingdom.

4) Regarding swearing oaths or making promises, in Chapter 5, Verses 34-37, Jesus taught against making any promises at all, saying **"but I tell you, don't swear at all."** Jesus taught that we must not make promises for the future, and must simply be true to our word, by letting our **"'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' be 'No'. Whatever is more than these is of the evil one."**

Regarding making vows to God specifically, it is written in the ancient Book of Ecclesiastes, Chapter 5, Verses 4-6, **"When you vow a vow to God, don't defer to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay that which you vow. It is better that**



**you should not vow, than that you should vow and not pay. Don't allow your mouth to lead you into sin."** These particular Verses speak directly to what Jesus was saying in Chapter 5, in that, it is better not to promise at all than to promise and not pay. And the portion of this Verse which reads "**Don't allow your mouth to lead you to sin**" reflects Jesus' reference to "**the evil one**", revealing that people must speak truthfully, and a spoken promise that is not kept is considered sinful. It is easy to promise something without knowing whether it can be fulfilled, or worse, without having the intention of fulfilling it.

## Part II

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 23, Verses 23-39

**23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith. But you ought to have done these, and not to have left the other undone. 24 You blind guides, who strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel! 25 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and unrighteousness. 26 You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the platter, that its outside may become clean also. 27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitened tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. 29 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and decorate the tombs of the righteous, 30 and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' 31 Therefore you testify to yourselves that you are children of those who killed the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. 33 You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of Gehenna? 34 Therefore behold, I send to you prophets, wise men, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify; and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city; 35 that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom you killed between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Most certainly I tell you, all these things will come upon this generation. 37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I would have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not! 38 Behold, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me from now on, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' "**

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 23, Verses 23-39

*Jesus continued His criticism & accusations toward the scribes & Pharisees, and the following reflections are provided to help understand the accusations that Jesus made.*

1) In the reflections of Chapter 15, it was explained that God told Moses that his brother Aaron, his sons, and all the generations of the tribe of Levi after them were to become the priests for the Israelite people. In the ancient Book of Numbers, Chapter 18, it is written that the Levite tribe would receive one tenth of all the produce, from the other tribes of Israel as a "tithe" inheritance for their services as their priests. The word "tithe" means "one tenth." In turn, the Levite priests were also obligated to offer up an offering to God of one tenth "tithe" from the "tithe" that they received. Jesus was confirming that the Pharisees & scribes were indeed

following their responsibility to provide their "tithe" offering to God. However, He pointed out that they were not following other more significant laws of God, which included justice, mercy & faith. Jesus then said that they "**ought to have done these, and not have left the other undone**", meaning that they were obligated to follow all of God's laws, which included both minor and major responsibilities. Jesus illustrated their errors with a metaphor, "**You blind guides, who strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel!**", that expressed their obedience to tiny aspects of the laws while neglecting to follow the more significant ones.

2) Next, Jesus accused the Pharisees, saying "**For you clean the outside of the cup and of the platter.**" The cup and the platter were vessels used in the "Passover" ceremony, which is a celebration that honors God for freeing the Israelite people from bondage in Egypt to freedom in the promise land, as led by Moses. Jesus was accusing them of focusing their attention on the cleanliness and presentation of these ceremonial vessels, instead of putting their emphasis on the importance of honoring God first. This accusation goes deeper than physically cleaning the vessels. Here Jesus also compares the Pharisees themselves to the vessels, and how they placed attention on their own outward appearance, rather than placing God as the central focus of the celebration. For this reason, Jesus called them hypocrites and then He spoke of their true nature, saying "**but within they are full of extortion & unrighteousness.**" Jesus continued "**You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the platter, that its outside may become clean also**"; meaning that they should shift their priorities inwardly toward improving themselves, by living righteously and honoring God first, and then both the Pharisees and the vessels would be "**clean.**" In the end it is God who sanctifies the cup and platter, not the Pharisees; and their emphasis should be on honoring God first instead of the cleanliness of the vessels, or their own outward appearances.

3) Jesus then compared the scribes and Pharisees to whitened tombs. In the same way that the outward appearance of tombs disguise the dead bones and uncleanness inside, so too did their outward appearance disguise their true hypocritical and wicked nature within.

4) The next accusation is made up of several combined elements: I) First, Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of boasting that they would not have participated in the persecution and deaths of the ancient prophets, if they had been living during the time of their forefathers. II) Second, Jesus revealed that, because of their boasting, they were in fact admitting that they were descended from those who killed the prophets throughout history. III) Consequently, Jesus said "**Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.**", which meant to complete or finish what their forefathers started. IV) To that very point, Jesus next said "**Therefore behold, I send to you prophets, wise men, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify; and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city.**" Jesus began this sentence by saying "**Therefore behold, I send to you...**" which indicates that He was predicting that they would persecute and kill followers of Jesus Himself, and in doing so, they would be completing and finishing

what their forefathers had started. V) The outcome for them, Jesus warned was **"that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah, son of Barachiah, whom you killed between the sanctuary and the altar"**, meaning that the scribes and Pharisees would inherit the guilt for murders of all righteous men of God throughout history, through the willful actions that they were about to put into motion and be responsible for.

The ancient Book of Genesis, Chapter 4, records the history of a man named Abel and his brother Cain. God respected Abel but He did not respect Cain, which made Cain very angry. In Verses 6-7, it is written that God said to Cain, **"Why are you angry? Why has the expression on your face fallen? If you do well, won't it be lifted up? If you don't do well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire is for you, but you are to rule over it."** In the next Verse, it is written that, **"Cain said to Abel, his brother, 'Let's go into the field.' While they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him."** God's respect for Abel stirred up anger in Cain. God warned Cain not to give in to his anger, because that would invite sin to take control of him. God told Cain that he must instead take control and rule over sin. Cain rejected God's advice, which in turn enabled sin to overpower him, and as a result he killed his own brother. Therefore, in the earliest Book of ancient Scripture it is written that a man rejected God, sin overcame that man, and he then killed the one who God respected. As Jesus revealed, this pattern repeated itself from Abel onward through time, and Jesus was predicting that the scribes and Pharisees would continue to do the same.

5) Jesus said, **"Most certainly I tell you, all these things shall come upon this generation."** Jesus was here predicting that future judgment is to come upon people who do not live according to God's will, which Jesus here referred to as **"this generation."** In later Chapters, Jesus will reveal specific details about this future time of judgment, when there will be a separation of those who live according to God's will from those who do not.

6) Once again, Jesus referred to Gehenna, which represents the wrath of God, and He asked the scribes and Pharisees **"How will you escape the judgment of Gehenna"**, which implied that their actions would have inescapable consequences at the time of judgement.

7) Jesus said **"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I would have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not!"** Here Jesus was expressing God's love and compassion toward the Israelite people, even after they had murdered the prophets and others whom God had sent to them (which would soon also include His Son). Jesus was showing them God's deep regret for their actions and proving that God's only desire for His people is that they seek Him first and live according to His will, and yet they refuse.

8) Jesus said, "**Behold your house is left to you desolate.**" Their "house" was their temple in Jerusalem, and the term "desolate" can be translated as "abandoned" or "uninhabited." Therefore, Jesus was saying that as a result of their ongoing rejection of God's will, and for the crimes that they were about to set into motion, the presence of God would no longer be found within their temple. We will reflect further on this in later Chapters.

9) Jesus' final words may have confused the scribes and Pharisees, when He said, "**For I tell you, you will not see me from now on, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'**" This statement is extremely important because it is the fulfillment of Jesus' experiences and teachings from several previous Chapters. In Chapter 13, Jesus said "**Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they don't see, and hearing, they don't hear, neither do they understand. In them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says, 'By hearing you will hear, and will in no way understand; Seeing you will see, and will in no way perceive: for this people's heart has grown callous, their ears are dull of hearing, they have closed their eyes; or else perhaps they might perceive with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and would turn again; and I would heal them'.**" This statement and prophecy speaks directly to the scribes, Pharisees and others who witnessed Jesus' miracles and heard His teachings, and yet chose not to believe and rejected Him. So, when Jesus now said, "**you will not see me from now on**", the context of these words, are that they would no longer have the opportunity to see Him for who He really was. Just a few sentences earlier, Jesus claimed "**Jerusalem...how often I would have gathered your children together...and you would not!**". In addition to what was previously reflected on these words, Jesus was referring to His own efforts to unite God's people, and yet, history repeated itself and He was rejected too. That being said, in Chapter 21, upon His arrival into Jerusalem, it was written that the multitudes surrounding Jesus were shouting "**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**" It was reflected that this was the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy from Zechariah, Chapter 9, and Psalms, Chapter 118. Therefore, there were those who did see, hear and believe in Jesus; and He did have a great following, regardless of those who would not believe in Him. It is ironic that many of the Pharisees and scribes were blind to the miracles that Jesus performed, and deaf to His teachings which were so deeply rooted and predicted in the ancient Scriptures that they themselves taught. In Chapter 19, it was reflected that Jesus Himself would judge on the day of judgment; and so, if we consider all these points together, Jesus was saying to those who rejected Him, that they would truly see Him for who He really was when the time of judgment comes. On that day, they themselves would realize their blindness and say, "**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord**", which would acknowledge that Jesus was referring to Himself with these words, and that He did deserve their honor and praise.

## Considerations for people seeking to know God

1) Jesus specifically pointed out that the scribes and Pharisees were ignoring the **"weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and faith."** The following considerations can be made on these three matters: I) Regarding **"justice"**: The ancient Book of Amos is about God's anger and impending wrath against the people of Israel for turning away from Him, and for their acts of injustice. It is written that God described His people to the prophet Amos as follows: i) **"they have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; They trample on the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and deny justice to the oppressed;"** ii) **"you who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth"** iii) **"you who afflict the just, who take a bribe, and who turn aside the needy in the courts."** In these three quotes from this ancient Book, God was speaking out against injustice, and it is later written in the same Book that God said, **"Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the courts."** Therefore, God desires us to honor justice and live accordingly. II) Regarding **"mercy"**: In Chapter 5, Jesus taught **"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."** Therefore, God is merciful and in order to live according to God's will, we are required to show mercy towards other people. Further to that point, in Chapters 9 and 12, Jesus pointed the Pharisees toward the ancient Book of Hosea, Chapter 6, where it is written that God said **"For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."** In those Chapters, Jesus was showing the Pharisees that God's desire is for us to show mercy towards each other, and seek to know Him, more than He desires practicing the traditions of giving offerings to Him. III) Regarding **"faith"**: Throughout this book, the importance of having faith has been a central teaching of Jesus, and now He was revealing that having faith is one of the most important laws of God. In the ancient Book of Habakkuk, Chapter 2, Verse 4, it is written that, God said **"but the righteous will live by his faith."**

2) Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of placing the importance of their own appearances and of the cleanliness of the ceremonial vessels above honoring God. This teaches us to honor God above ourselves, and above the minor details included in religious traditions and ceremonies.

3) All these accusations made by Jesus against the scribes and Pharisees teach that people may not always be exactly who they appear to be; and that those in religious positions may, in some cases, present themselves as holy and devoted to God, but in reality, may not be practicing what they preach.

# The Temple, False Christs and Birth Pains

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 24, Verses 1-14

1 Jesus went out from the temple, and was going on his way. His disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. 2 But he answered them, "**You see all of these things, don't you? Most certainly I tell you, there will not be left here one stone on another, that will not be thrown down.**"

3 As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?"

4 Jesus answered them, "**Be careful that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will lead many astray. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you aren't troubled, for all this must happen, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be famines, plagues, and earthquakes in various places. 8 But all these things are the beginning of birth pains. 9 Then they will deliver you up to oppression, and will kill you. You will be hated by all of the nations for my name's sake. 10 Then many will stumble, and will deliver up one another, and will hate one another. 11 Many false prophets will arise, and will lead many astray. 12 Because iniquity will be multiplied, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But he who endures to the end will be saved. 14 This Good News of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.**"

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 24, Verses 1-14

1) This Chapter begins with the disciples wanting Jesus to admire the temple buildings, but His reply was "**You see all of these things, don't you? Most certainly I tell you, there will not be left here one stone on another, that will not be thrown down.**" In the Book of Luke, Chapter 21, Verse 6, it is recorded that Jesus told a group of people the exact same thing when they were talking about how beautiful the temple was; and in the Book of Mark, Chapter 13, Verse 2, it is also recorded that Jesus said the same thing again to a single disciple who was asking Jesus about the temple and its' buildings. In later years, the temple does in fact become destroyed by the Romans, and so Jesus' prediction does happen in the future. However, Jesus' words had a much deeper meaning beyond the temple's physical destruction, He was also predicting the destruction of the temple's spiritual significance as well. We will reflect on the destruction of the temple's spiritual significance in later Chapters.

The Book of John, Chapter 2, records an event where Jesus drove money changers and merchants out of the temple, and it is written in Verses 19-21, that the people reacted to Jesus' actions by asking Him, "**What sign do you show us, seeing that you do these things?**" Jesus answered them, "**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**" The Jews therefore said, "It took forty-six years to build



**this temple! Will you raise it up in three days?" But He spoke of the temple of his body.**" In this situation, the people were asking Jesus for a sign of His authority to drive money changers and merchants out of the temple; to which He replied, **"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"**, as the sign of His authority. The people then questioned His ability to resurrect a destroyed temple in three days. However, the Verse **"But He spoke of the temple of his body"** revealed that Jesus was actually referring to His own death and resurrection as the sign, rather than His physically rebuilding the destroyed temple in three days. In Chapters 16, 17 and 20, it has been written that Jesus predicted His upcoming death and that He would be raised to life again three days later. The reflections in upcoming Chapters will further explain how Jesus' death and resurrection will represent the destruction and rebuilding of the destroyed temple.

2) Next, it is written that the disciples privately approached Jesus and asked Him: **"Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?"** In several previous Chapters, Jesus has made references to a time of separation, judgment and harvest, which He also referred to as **"the end of this age."** In Chapter 16, Jesus spoke of a time when He would return after His death, on God's behalf, and **"will render to everyone according to his deeds."** In this next section of the Chapter, Jesus went into very specific and great detail about the signs of this upcoming time. The signs that Jesus revealed are horrific and do not necessarily need further reflection. However, the considerations for those seeking to know God are significant.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

*It is important to be able to recognize the signs of the end of the age that Jesus has revealed. However, it is equally important to understand the advice that He also gave, together with the signs, as they specifically apply as considerations for people seeking to know God.*

1) Before revealing the horrific details about the signs of the end of the age, Jesus first warned **"Be careful that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name saying, "I am the Christ" and will lead many astray."** Just as the Pharisees were hypocrites leading people away from living according to God's will in Jesus' time; similarly, Jesus was revealing that there will be people who will claim to be "the Christ" to lead people away from His true teachings, in the years that lead up to the end of the age. Keeping this particular warning top of mind is important, because Jesus has revealed that He is **"the Christ"**, and so believing in Him and His teachings is the key to remaining faithful to God, and necessary to avoid being led astray.

2) Jesus began by listing the following signs: I) **"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars"** II) **"Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom"** III) **"There will be famines, plagues and earthquakes in various places."** These will be frightening times, but Jesus said **"See that you aren't troubled"** because, He explained **"all this must happen, but the end is not yet"** and that



**"these things are the beginning of birth pains."** Therefore, Jesus has assured us that we should not be worried about these early signs. They are supposed to happen and are the beginning of the end of the age time. Jesus referred to these times as **"birth pains"**, which provides a good relatable word picture. Through the pain of giving birth, a new life begins. In the same way, after the difficulties endured at the end of the age, those who follow Jesus will be rewarded with a new life.

3) Next, Jesus predicted that some of His followers will experience oppression, be killed and hated by all nations, for His name's sake. In Chapter 5, Jesus taught **"Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you."** This previous teaching of Jesus predicted that there will be opposition against people who believe in Him, and so these new warnings follow that early teaching. The key to remember is that Jesus taught us to rejoice and be happy for this, because we will be blessed for our faithful belief in Him, and we will be greatly rewarded in Heaven for it.

4) Jesus predicted that **"many will stumble, and will deliver up one another, and will hate one another."** We've reflected in previous Chapters that to **"stumble"** referred to losing faith in Jesus and God; and so, this is what Jesus was referring to when He predicted that many will stumble at that time. In addition, because of their loss of faith, they will turn against each other and hate one another too.

5) Jesus continued to predict that **"Because iniquity will be multiplied, the love of many will grow cold"**, meaning that, because of the increase of evil and wickedness, many people's hearts will grow cold against each other, and they'll lose their love for one another. And yet, He said **"But he who endures to the end, the same will be saved."** In Chapter 22, Jesus taught that the two most important commandments of God are: I) To love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind and II) To love your neighbor as yourself. Therefore, those people who do not lose faith in Jesus and God, in spite of the increased evil and wickedness surrounding them, and who continue to love God and love their neighbors throughout the end of the age time, will **"be saved"**, which refers to being rewarded in Heaven.

6) Jesus said, **"This Good News of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come."** Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven is **"This Good News."** The term "testimony" can be interpreted as a declaration of truth or a fact provided as evidence of something. Therefore, Jesus was revealing that His teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven will be spread throughout the whole world, to declare the truth about God's Kingdom to all nations, before the end of the age will come. This is indeed Good News, because, all people of the world will hear and have a chance to follow Jesus into the Kingdom of Heaven before the final end comes.

# The Abomination of Desolation

## The ancient Book of Matthew, Chapter 24, Verse 15

15 "**When, therefore, you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand).**"

## Reflections from Matthew, Chapter 24, Verse 15

1) Jesus said to His disciples "**When, therefore, you see the abomination of desolation,**" to let them know that they themselves would witness the events that were the beginnings of the end of the age.

2) Jesus continued "**which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet,**". Here Jesus was pointing His disciples toward the ancient Book of Daniel, so they would also know that Daniel had already written prophecies about the end of the age. The part of Daniel's prophecy that Jesus specifically mentioned was the "**abomination of desolation.**" In the ancient Book of Daniel there are three references to the "**abomination of desolation**", and they can be found in Chapters 9, 11 and 12. Each Chapter offers a piece of a complete prophecy that would unfold over time and includes specific events that lead up to the end of the age.

In the actual prophetic writings of Daniel, his words are slightly different from Jesus' reference, as Daniel wrote the "**abomination that makes desolate.**" Therefore, according to the prophecy, it is the abominations themselves that cause desolation. The term "abomination" refers to a detestable act, and this word is used in other ancient Scriptures to refer to disgusting and offensive things or actions that are unacceptable to God. The term "desolation" refers to desertion or abandonment. Therefore the "abomination that makes desolate" is a reference to a detestable act that is unacceptable to God which causes abandonment.

3) Jesus continued, saying "**standing in the holy place.**" The "**holy place**" refers to the Sanctuary within the temple of Jerusalem, where God would dwell whenever His presence descended upon the temple. We will reflect further upon the Sanctuary and how it relates to Daniel's prophecy and Jesus in later Chapters.

4) Finally, the Verse is completed with "**(let the reader understand).**" These words are meant to emphasize how significant and important it is for people who read Daniel's prophecy to understand the meaning of it.

In Chapter 9 of the Book of Daniel, Daniel is recorded praying on behalf of God's people for God's mercy and forgiveness. While Daniel was praying, the angel Gabriel appeared to him; this was the same angel who would later appear to Mary and tell her that she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and give birth to Jesus.

In Verses 20-24, Daniel wrote **"While I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before Yahweh my God for the holy mountain of my God; yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening offering. He instructed me, and talked with me, and said, Daniel "I have now come to give you wisdom and understanding. At the beginning of your petitions the commandment went out, and I have come to tell you; for you are greatly beloved. Therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision. "Seventy weeks are decreed on your people and on your holy city, to finish disobedience, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy."**

The angel Gabriel continued revealing the vision to Daniel, and the first time the **"abomination of desolation"** is recorded is in the final Verse of Chapter 9, where it's written: **"He will make a firm covenant with many for one week. In the middle of the week he will cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease. On the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate; and even to the full end, and that determined, wrath will be poured out on the desolate."**

This prophecy recorded by Daniel is difficult to interpret at this time. However, it is predicting the beginning of the end of the age and will be further explained in the reflections in later Chapters, which will also reveal that this prophecy is specifically about Jesus.

# Instructions and Warnings

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 24, Verses 16-28

16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take out the things that are in his house. 18 Let him who is in the field not return back to get his clothes. 19 But woe to those who are with child and to nursing mothers in those days! 20 Pray that your flight will not be in the winter, nor on a Sabbath, 21 for then there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever will be. 22 Unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved. But for the sake of the chosen ones, those days will be shortened.

23 "Then if any man tells you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or, 'There,' don't believe it. 24 For there will arise false christs, and false prophets, and they will show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen ones. 25 "Behold, I have told you beforehand. 26 If therefore they tell you, 'Behold, he is in the wilderness,' don't go out; or 'Behold, he is in the inner rooms,' don't believe it. 27 For as the lightning flashes from the east, and is seen even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 28 For wherever the carcass is, that is where the vultures gather together.

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 24, Verses 16-28

*There aren't any specific reflections for these particular Verses. However, the instructions and warnings that Jesus revealed in these Verses do specifically apply as considerations for those seeking to know God.*

## Considerations for people seeking to know God

*In these Verses of the Chapter, Jesus moved from the signs of the end of the age into instructions and warnings.*

- 1) Jesus' first instruction was that people should "**flee to the mountains**", meaning to get away from where harm could come to them.
- 2) Jesus then instructed that they leave behind their worldly possessions and pray to God for help through their journey, for there will be great oppression during that time, like never seen before or will be seen again.
- 3) Next, Jesus revealed God's great mercy by saying "**But for the sake of the chosen ones, those days will be shortened.**" It has been reflected in previous Chapters that the "**chosen ones**" are people who follow Jesus' teachings, seek God and live according to His will; and so those days of oppression will be shortened for their sake.

4) Jesus warns not to listen to those who try to direct people to believe in and follow so called "**false christs**" and "**false prophets**." Even though these may demonstrate and show acts of great signs and wonders, Jesus said that they are doing these things "**so as to lead astray**." This meant that these false christs and false prophets will be intentionally trying to lead people away from God.

5) Jesus revealed that when the "**Son of Man**" appears it will be obvious enough and no one will need to point it out; just like when lightning flashes, it is revealed in both the east and the west all at once and comes without warning.

6) Finally, Jesus said "**For wherever the carcass is, that is where the vultures gather together**." A carcass is the remains of something dead. Vultures are drawn to dead carcasses and they gather together to feed off them. The carcass represents the spiritually dead, which are those who don't follow Jesus' teachings or live according to God's will. The vultures are a parable for the false christs and prophets who lead people away from God and His promise of life eternal. In Chapter 8, Jesus gave a similar reference to one of His disciples whose father had just died, when he asked Jesus, "Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "**Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead**."

# Signs and The End of The Age

## Part I

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 24, Verses 29-35

**29 But immediately after the suffering of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; 30 and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. 31 He will send out his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.**

**32 "Now from the fig tree learn this parable. When its branch has now become tender, and produces its leaves, you know that the summer is near. 33 Even so you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. 34 Most certainly I tell you, this generation will not pass away, until all these things are accomplished. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.**

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 24, Verses 29-35

*There aren't any specific reflections for these particular Verses, however, the signs which Jesus revealed in these Verses do specifically apply as considerations for those seeking to know God.*

### Considerations for people seeking to know God

1) These signs refer specifically to the coming of the "**Son of Man**." Jesus said that these signs will happen "**immediately after the oppression of those days**" has occurred. These signs will include:

- I) "**The sun will be darkened**"
- II) "**The moon will not give its light**"
- III) "**The stars will fall from the sky**"
- IV) "**The powers of the heavens will be shaken**"
- V) "**The sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky**"
- VI) "**All the tribes of the earth will mourn**"

2) Then Jesus said, "**they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. He will send out his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.**" Therefore, the end of the age will also be a time when the Son of Man will send out His angels to gather "**his chosen ones**" from all over the world. The identity of "**chosen ones**", was previously noted as those who follow Jesus' teachings, seek God and live according to His will. Chapter 8 was

the first time where Jesus referred to Himself as the "Son of Man", and in that same Chapter a prophecy from the ancient Book of Daniel was reflected upon, where the prophet also referred to the "Son of Man." In this ancient prophecy, Daniel wrote about a vision that he had about a time of judgment, and he wrote: **"I saw in the night visions, and behold, there came with the clouds of the sky one like a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. Dominion was given him, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which will not pass away, and his kingdom that which will not be destroyed."** Here in Chapter 24, Jesus spoke the words **"they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory"**, which align with the prophecy of Daniel. Therefore, the details of this prophecy of Daniel's completes the picture for what will happen after the Son of Man comes and gathers His **"chosen ones."**

3) Jesus used a parable that summer is near when leaves begin to appear on the trees, as a comparison for us to recognize that the end of the age will be near when we see these signs that Jesus predicted starting to happen. Here Jesus was revealing that these are the clues to look for, in order to recognize that the final stage of the end of the age is happening.

4) Jesus said, **"Most certainly I tell you, this generation will not pass away, until all these things are accomplished."** These words predict the certainty of the coming of the end of the age, and that it will happen in the same way that Jesus has predicted. **"This generation"** refers to all people who have lived from Jesus' time right up to the final end of the age; and saying that **"This generation will not pass away"** meant that people will continue to reject Jesus' teachings, and refuse to live according to God's will, right up to the time **"until all these things are accomplished."** Therefore, after these predictions from Jesus have been completed, the time (or this generation) of unfaithful people will come to an end.

5) Jesus continued, **"Heaven and earth will pass away,"**. These words reveal a coming change in the order of Heaven and earth, as it exists prior to the end of the age. Jesus then predicted, **"but my words will not pass away."** Jesus' words have not passed away, nor have they been lost since He spoke them approximately 2000 years ago; and they continue to spread around the world today. In Chapter 5, Verse 18, Jesus said **"For most certainly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter or one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished."** In that Chapter, it was reflected that **"the law"** referred to the Books of "the Law", which were commandments given by God to Moses, who wrote them down to instruct people about how to live according to God's will. Just as Jesus predicted in Chapter 5, Moses' teachings also continue to spread around the world today. These predictions that Jesus' words and the "Laws" given to Moses will not **"pass away"** have remained true. Therefore, it would be wise not to question the certainty of the end of the age, the coming of the



Son of Man, and a coming new Kingdom of God that will replace both Heaven and earth. Jesus will teach more about this new Kingdom of Heaven in the next Chapter.

## Part II

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 24, Verses 36-51

**36 But no one knows of that day and hour, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only. 37 "As the days of Noah were, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 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 ship, 39 and they didn't know until the flood came, and took them all away, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and one will be left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and one will be left. 42 Watch therefore, for you don't know in what hour your Lord comes. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 Therefore also be ready, for in an hour that you don't expect, the Son of Man will come. 45 "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord has set over his household, to give them their food in due season? 46 Blessed is that servant whom his lord finds doing so when he comes. 47 Most certainly I tell you that he will set him over all that he has. 48 But if that evil servant should say in his heart, 'My lord is delaying his coming,' 49 and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eat and drink with the drunkards, 50 the lord of that servant will come in a day when he doesn't expect it, and in an hour when he doesn't know it, 51 and will cut him in pieces, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. That is where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be.**

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 24, Verses 36-51

1) Jesus said, "**no one knows of that day and hour, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only.**" This revealed that only God knows the exact day and hour of the end of the age and the coming of the Son of Man, and that it will remain hidden and happen when it is unexpected.

2) Jesus compared the coming of the Son of Man with "**the days of Noah.**" The history of a man named Noah is recorded in the ancient Book of Genesis, Chapters 6-9. In Verse 5, it is written "**Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was continually only evil.**" Then in Verse 8, it is written "**But Noah found favor in Yahweh's eyes**", and in Verse 9 it is written "**Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time. Noah walked with God.**" Because of the wickedness of the people that plagued the earth, God planned a great flood to cover the earth and destroy all of humanity. Because of his righteousness, God told Noah to build a ship so that he and his family would be saved. When the flood came, it was unexpected and all of humanity was unprepared and drowned, except for Noah and his family. In this Chapter, Jesus said this about that event "**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 ship, and they didn't know until the flood came, and took them all away. So will be the**

**coming of the Son of Man.**" These words describe how people were completely unaware of their impending doom, and Jesus said that this is how the people will also be at the time of "**the coming of the Son of Man.**"

3) This will be the time of judgment and separation that Jesus so often referred to throughout Matthew. Jesus reveals that "**one will be taken and one will be left**", which aligns with His teaching about the angels who will "**gather together his chosen ones.**" Jesus confirmed that the people who are watching and ready will be blessed, because the hour is not known and will come unexpectedly like a thief in the night. What does it mean to "**be ready**"? Jesus compared those who are ready to a faithful and wise servant, who has responsibility over the owner's household, while he is away. When the owner of the household returns, He finds his servant doing what is expected of him. In contrast, those who are not ready, would be like an unfaithful servant who tells himself that the owner's return would be delayed, and then behaves dishonorably and ignores his responsibilities to the owner; for which he is punished by the owner when he returns unexpectedly. Therefore, to be ready means to be faithful and obedient to God, and to fulfill the responsibilities that God is expecting of His people.

4) Once again Jesus describes the fate of the unfaithful servant as a place "**where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be.**" In Chapter 22, we reflected upon the three other times when Jesus used these words. Each time, we reflected upon what is required to avoid this devastating fate and enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. The reflections were I) To have faith and belief in Jesus II) To have faith that won't be shaken or lost, while living a life that is not sinful III) And finally, to be prepared and accountable before God, in His presence.

Now in this Chapter, through the parable of the faithful and wise servant, Jesus has added that people must also "**be ready**", by following the responsibilities and expectations that God has of them, which means to live faithfully and according to His will.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Knowing that only God knows the exact day and hour of the end of the age and the coming of the Son of Man, and that it will remain hidden and happen unexpectedly, can motivate us to follow Jesus' teachings and live according to God's will in preparation for it.

2) Comparing the time of Noah and the flood with the coming of the Son of Man provides us with the following considerations: 1) In Noah's time, evil and wickedness plagued the hearts of humanity, and no one, other than Noah, lived according to God's will. People were completely unaware of their impending doom, and as a result, they were all unexpectedly destroyed by the flood. 2) Since Jesus' time, sin has continued to plague humanity. However, Jesus provides us with a clear warning about the upcoming end of the age event, and He advises us to be prepared for it. Through the teachings of Jesus, we have been given instruction to turn our

hearts away from the desires and temptations of this world, and to follow His teachings, to seek God, and to live according to His will, while we still have the opportunity to do so.

3) It is written in the Book of Genesis that Noah "**walked with God**" and he was saved because of it. Therefore, in Noah we find an example of God's saving grace for those who live according to His will.

4) In the parable of the unfaithful servant, Jesus said "**But if that evil servant should say in his heart, 'my lord is delaying his coming'**" These words represent a person fooling themselves into thinking that they have extra time to get ready for God, and then putting off preparing for Him to a later date. Since the end of the age time and of the coming of the Son of Man is hidden, just as the time of a person's death is also hidden, it would be wise to be prepared when that day comes. Like the faithful and wise servant who was prepared, we too will be required to be ready, in order to share in the rewards of God's Kingdom when that unexpected day arrives.

# Kingdom of Heaven – Parables 4

## Part I

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 25, Verses 1-13

**1**"Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. **2** Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. **3** Those who were 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 delayed, they all slumbered and slept. **6** But at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold! The bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!' **7** Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. **8** The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' **9** But the wise answered, saying, 'What if there isn't enough for us and you? You go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' **10** While they went away to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut. **11** Afterward the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' **12** But he answered, 'Most certainly I tell you, I don't know you.' **13** Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 25, Verses 1-13

*In these Verses, Jesus continues His teachings about the end of the age and the coming of the Son of Man, and reveals details about being accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

1) Jesus began by saying "**Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like**" and then He continued with a parable about wise and foolish virgins. Jesus taught that five virgins were wise because they had prepared their lamps with enough oil to accompany the bridegroom into "**the wedding feast**"; and five virgins were foolish because they had not prepared their lamps with enough oil to accompany the bridegroom into **the wedding feast**. In the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 119, Verse 105, the following is written about the Word of God "**Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path**", and so the lamps in this parable represent the Word of God.

2) Jesus said, "**while the bridegroom delayed**", which revealed that the virgins did not know exactly when the bridegroom would arrive; which mirrors not knowing exactly when the Son of Man will come. In response to this delay, Jesus said that the virgins "**all slumbered and slept**", which implied that they were all in a state of inactivity and simply waiting. It was only when they heard "**Behold! The bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!**" that the foolish virgins realized that they needed to get more lamp oil. The wise virgins were unable to share their oil because they only had enough for themselves. By the time the foolish virgins obtained enough lamp oil, it was too late for them; the bridegroom and the wise

virgins had already entered into the wedding feast, and the door to the feast was shut. Jesus said that when the foolish virgins pleaded at the door "**Lord, Lord, open to us**", the Lord of the wedding feast rejected them, saying "**Most certainly I tell you, I don't know you.**"

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) In Chapter 22, Jesus taught another parable that also compared Heaven with a wedding feast. In that parable, the king of the feast rejected the guest who arrived without wearing wedding clothes. When the king asked him why he wasn't properly dressed, the man was described as being "**speechless.**" It was reflected that his arriving without wedding clothes represented his not being prepared and that he could not account for himself.

In this Chapter, Jesus once again used a wedding feast as a parable to describe the Kingdom of Heaven; but this time the parable was specifically about being prepared. In this parable, the virgins' lamps represent the Word of God (as is written in the Book of Psalms, Chapter 119), the bridegroom represents the Son of Man, and the wedding feast represents the Kingdom of Heaven. The foolish virgins had some oil, but they weren't fully prepared with enough to light their path all the way into the feast. On the other hand, the wise virgins had fully prepared their lamps, and they were able to accompany the bridegroom into the feast. This parable expands upon the parable of the unprepared guest without wedding clothes and reveals what it means to be prepared. This is a parable about being prepared to accompany the Son of Man into the Kingdom of Heaven. Being prepared is to know and fully understand God's Word. Therefore, it is not enough to partially understand God's Word; God requires that we have a full understanding of His Word in order to be accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven.

2) Jesus' parable described that even though the foolish virgins did eventually acquire enough oil, the Lord rejected them because the door of the feast had been shut. This emphasizes the need to be fully prepared in God's Word before the Son of Man comes, because once He has arrived, it will be too late for those who have not prepared themselves in advance. Jesus confirmed that this parable is indeed about being prepared before the Son of Man comes, because he finished the parable with a warning, saying "**Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is Coming.**"

3) In this Chapter, five virgins are accepted, and five virgins are rejected from the wedding feast. This reflects Jesus' earlier teaching in the last Chapter when He said that when the Son of Man comes "**one will be taken and one will be left.**"

## Part II

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 25, Verses 14-30

14 "For it is like a man, going into another country, who called his own servants, and entrusted his goods to them. 15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his own ability. Then he went on his journey. 16 Immediately he who received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. 17 In the same way, he also who got the two gained another two. 18 But he who received the one talent went away and dug in the earth, and hid his lord's money. 19 "Now after a long time the lord of those servants came, and reconciled accounts with them. 20 He who received the five talents came and brought another five talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents. Behold, I have gained another five talents in addition to them.' 21 "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' 22 "He also who got the two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents. Behold, I have gained another two talents in addition to them.' 23 "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' 24 "He also who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you that you are a hard man, reaping where you didn't sow, and gathering where you didn't scatter. 25 I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the earth. Behold, you have what is yours.' 26 "But his lord answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant. You knew that I reap where I didn't sow, and gather where I didn't scatter. 27 You ought therefore to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back my own with interest. 28 Take away therefore the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29 For to everyone who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who doesn't have, even that which he has will be taken away. 30 Throw out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 25, Verses 14-30

1) Jesus continued to teach in parables about being accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven, saying "**For it is like a man, going into another country, who called his own servants, and entrusted his goods to them.**" Jesus explained that the man gave a portion of his worth to each of his servants to manage; however, each servant was not given the same portion. Jesus said that they were given "**each according to his own ability.**" In this parable, the servants were given currency from their lord. The currency represents the knowledge of God's Word, and by extension, the faith in God that a person has. While the man was away, two of the servants doubled the value of the worth that had been "**entrusted**" to them. In Chapter 5, Jesus taught that God's people are the salt and light of the world. Like salt, God's people can enhance the lives of others by sharing their knowledge of God's Word with them. By sharing their knowledge of God's Word, they are shedding God's light on those who



live in spiritual darkness. In Chapter 13, Jesus told the parable of the farmer sowing seeds, and how only some of the seeds landed on good ground to grow and **"produce fruit."** It was reflected that people who produce fruit are those who live according to God's will; who increase their faith and knowledge of God through His Word, and who share God's Word with others to the best of their ability. The two servants in this parable increased the value of their lord's worth by increasing their faith and knowledge of God, and by sharing God's Word with others. The lord praised the efforts of those servants saying, **"Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things."** These words praise the "faithfulness" of each servant, which enabled them to increase their lord's worth. Their reward was to **"Enter into the joy of your lord"**, which represents entering into the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven. In the parable of the farmer sowing seeds, from Chapter 13, Jesus explained that the seed **"sown on the good ground, this is he who hears the word, and understands it, who most certainly bears fruit, and produces, some one hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty."** This revealed that people who live according to God's will do not all increase their faith and knowledge of God or share God's Word to the same extent as each other. In this parable of the servants, each servant is given a different amount of currency, and they don't produce the same results either, but it is written that each was **"given according to his own ability."** Therefore, it becomes clear that those who hear and understand God's Word must increase their faith and knowledge of God, and share God's Word with others, to the extent they are able; and for that, they will be rewarded in Heaven.

2) Next, the lord approached the servant to whom He gave the smallest portion of currency to manage. The servant said **"Lord, I knew you, that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter."** These words support the role that people play in sharing God's Word with others. God does not set the knowledge of His Word into the hearts of all people. Instead, seeds of His knowledge are set into the hearts of people through other people, who share their faith and God's Word with them. Therefore, some people are given the gift of the knowledge of God, while others receive seeds of His knowledge through those who have been given the gift.

3) The unfaithful servant continued to say **"I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the earth. Behold, you have what is yours."** These words reveal the great depth of Jesus' wisdom. Jesus used these words to represent all those who have been given the gift of faith and knowledge of God, and yet still turn away from Him. To help understand the meaning of these two sentences, it may be helpful to break the sentence structure down. Jesus said that the unfaithful servant answered I) **"I was afraid"**, meaning that he was afraid of following in faith and sharing God's Word with others. II) **"and went away"**, meaning he turned away from God, and from living according to God's will. III) **"and hid your talent"**, meaning he hid His faith, and knowledge of God. IV) **"in the earth."**, meaning he instead focused on the things of this world. V) Finally, He said **"Behold, you have what is yours."**

meaning he returned to God the same amount of faith and knowledge that he was originally given.

4) The lord's response was "**You wicked and slothful servant.**" The lord called the servant "**wicked**" because he had been given the knowledge of God and yet repressed it, and therefore, his actions were against God. He then accused the man of being "**slothful**", which implied that he was lazy about his faith and his willingness to share his faith with others.

5) The lord continued "**You knew that I reap where I didn't sow, and gather where I didn't scatter.**" These words confirm and support the role that people play in sharing God's Word with others. God does not set the knowledge of His Word into the hearts of all people. Instead, seeds of His knowledge are set into the hearts of people through other people, who share their faith and God's Word with them. Therefore, the knowledge of God spreads through those who have been given knowledge, and in the end, more people come to know God and become followers after they hear and believe in what has been shared with them.

6) The lord then said "**You ought therefore to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back my own with interest.**" The servant not only hid his faith and knowledge of God away from others, he also buried it away from himself. Depositing it with the bankers to gain interest, represents growing his own faith by seeking and increasing his own knowledge of God. The lord was accusing the servant of not increasing his own gift of faith and knowledge for himself, regardless of the fact that He chose not to share it with others.

7) The lord's reaction to the unfaithful servant was "**Take away therefore the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who doesn't have, even that which he has will be taken away.**" Jesus was here repeating the same words that He used in Chapter 13. In that Chapter, and in this Chapter, the meaning is the same; Jesus was not speaking about including or excluding anyone. When Jesus said "**everyone who has**" and "**who doesn't have**", He was referring to a person's faith and their knowledge of God. To know God, people must first have faith and believe in God, next they must seek to know Him, and finally they must be open to receiving Him into their lives. Therefore, it is through faith and seeking to know God that people are given understanding of Him. And, if a person chooses not to follow their faith, or worse denies their own faith, in the end, whatever faith and knowledge they might have had will be lost. This is what Jesus meant by saying; "**but from him who doesn't have, even that which he has will be taken away.**"

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) As a consequence of the unfaithful servant's behavior, the lord said, "**Throw out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping**

**and gnashing of teeth."** Once again, this description of the servant's fate is the same as has been described for others who were cast out of God's Kingdom in previous Chapters. This therefore, is another lesson about being accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven. God requires that we who have been given faith and some understanding of God's Word, increase our faith and knowledge, and share God's Word with others, to the extent of which we are able.

2) In the two parables of this Chapter, Jesus was teaching about the judgement and separation that can be expected when the Son of Man comes. These teachings are warnings about the importance of maintaining and growing our faith, living according to God's will, and being prepared for God when the Son of Man comes. During this end of the age time, all people will be accountable for their behavior. Those who have used their gifts of faith and knowledge of God wisely will be rewarded. However, those who have not, will have to face the consequences and be accountable without having any excuse.

# The Coming of The Son of Man

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 25, Verses 31-46

31 "But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32 Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35 for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. 36 I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 38 When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?' 40 "The King will answer them, 'Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' 41 Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry, and you didn't give me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; 43 I was a stranger, and you didn't take me in; naked, and you didn't clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you didn't visit me.' 44 "Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?' 45 "Then he will answer them, saying, 'Most certainly I tell you, because you didn't do it to one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me.' 46 These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 25, Verses 31-46

1) In this section, Jesus very specifically stated that all nations, and by extension all people, will be gathered and then separated into two categories when the Son of Man comes. Jesus said, "**Before Him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.**"

2) During this time, Jesus said "**Then the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'**" The ancient Book of Genesis records details of God's creation of all things, including the Kingdom that was prepared from the foundation of the world. In Genesis, Chapter 2, Verses 7-8, it is written "**Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. Yahweh God planted a garden eastward, in Eden, and there he put the man that he had formed.**" If we continue to read in

the Book of Genesis, it is written that God walked with man and woman in the garden of Eden, and it was a place of beauty that also provided good food to eat. Unfortunately, man and woman broke a commandment that God had given them, and so God punished them and then later cast them out of the garden of Eden. This garden was the Kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world.

3) There is another reference to the "**foundation of the world**" in the ancient Book of Micah, Chapter 6, Verses 1-2, where a prophecy is written that states: "**Listen now to what Yahweh says: 'Arise plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear what you have to say. Hear, you mountains, Yahweh's controversy, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for Yahweh has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel.'**" God's "**controversy with his people**" is that, from the beginning, people have continually turned away from Him. God intended humanity to live in harmony with Him. However, it has not been the case from the beginning in the garden of Eden; and has continued since man and woman were cast out of the garden. In Chapter 23, we reflected upon the murder recorded in the history of Cain and Abel, who were in fact the sons of the man and woman cast out of the garden of Eden. Sin overcame Cain, who then rejected God's advice, and killed his own brother. Therefore, sin and living against God's will has plagued humanity from the very beginning, which is the controversy between God and His people. The prophecy of Micah predicted that God would deal with this "**controversy with his people**", because it is written "**and He will contend with Israel.**" This prophecy of God contending with His people aligns with the Son of Man coming to separate those who do God's will from those who do not. There is good news for those people on the King's right hand though, as Jesus said "**Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world**", which refers to people who have been faithful to God and live according to His will. This too is prophecy that is written in the ancient Book of Jeremiah, where God will gather His people together, from all nations of the world, to be reunited with Him. In Jeremiah, Chapter 32, Verses 37-40, it is written: "**Behold, I will gather them out of all the countries where I have driven them in my anger, and in my wrath, and in great indignation; and I will bring them again to this place. I will cause them to dwell safely. Then they will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their good, and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from following them, to do them good. I will put my fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from me.**"

4) In this Chapter, Jesus was teaching that the Son of Man will come to execute judgement upon humanity and gather God's faithful people together to be reunited with Him. Throughout the Book of Matthew, Jesus has referred to Himself as the "Son of Man", and prophecy in the ancient Scriptures support Jesus as the one who will carry out this judgement. If we return to the ancient Book of Jeremiah, Chapter 33, Verse 15, it is written: "**In those days and at that time, I will cause a Branch of righteousness to grow up to David. He will execute justice and righteousness**

**in the land."** In the very first Chapter of this Book of Matthew, it is written that Jesus was descended from the line of King David; and in the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 11, Verses 1-5, there are more specific details relating to judgement coming through Jesus, where it is written **"A shoot will come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots will bear fruit. Yahweh's Spirit will rest on him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh. His delight will be in the fear of Yahweh. He will not judge by the sight of his eyes, neither decide by the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the poor, and decide with equity for the humble of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; and with the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked. Righteousness will be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his waist."** (**Special Note:** "Jesse" was King David's Father). Further on in Isaiah, Chapter 11, Verses 10-12, the prophecy continues **"It will happen in that day that the nations will seek the root of Jesse, who stands as a banner of the peoples; and his resting place will be glorious. It will happen in that day that the Lord will set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth."**

5) Jesus described the qualities that will divide people into two categories, when the time of separation comes. These qualities are displayed when people offer simple acts of kindness to others through: Sharing food and water, taking in strangers, providing essentials to those in need, comforting those who are sick and showing mercy to all people (including those convicted of crimes). If we return back to the Book of Micah, Chapter 6, we can also find what God requires of humanity, as the prophet wrote in Verse 8 **"He has shown you, O man, what is good. What does Yahweh require of you, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God?"** These requirements of humanity reflect the same qualities that Jesus was teaching in the Chapter, and they also mirror Jesus' previous teaching about the two greatest commandments of God, which are: I) To **"love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind"** and II) To **"love your neighbor as yourself"**; and in the reflections of Chapter 22, it is written that loving **"your neighbor"** refers to loving your fellow man, including strangers.

6) For those separated to the left of the King, Jesus revealed that the King will say **"Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels."** It has been reflected throughout this book that the fire is a reference to the wrath of God, and Jesus has often referred to a final place of outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus has here revealed that this destiny is also an eternal place, and that this place was **"prepared for the devil and his angels."** In Chapter 4, it is written that the devil was the one who tried to tempt Jesus away from His faith in God; and how Jesus' faith was so strong that He overcame the devil through quoting God's Word. Jesus has now



revealed that the destiny of those separated to the left of the King will be the same destiny as that which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.

7) The last Verse of this Chapter reveals the final destiny for all humanity at the time of separation. Jesus said that those on the left "**will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.**" It has been reflected that God punished man and woman for disobeying a commandment that He had given them in the garden of Eden. This commandment can be found in the ancient Book of Genesis, Chapter 2, Verses 16-17, where it is written "**Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree in the garden; but you shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die."** It is written that the woman was later tempted and ate fruit from this tree, and then convinced the man to eat some too. Once God found out that they had broken His commandment and eaten the fruit from this tree, he dealt several punishments upon them, including that they would die, just as he had warned them. However, if we continue in the Book of Genesis, we can find the reason why they were also cast out of the garden of Eden. In Chapter 3, Verses 22-23, it is written that "**Yahweh God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand, and also take of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever –" Therefore Yahweh God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken."** In Chapter 2 of Genesis, Verse 9, it is written that God made "**the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**" Therefore, the "**tree of life**", that provides eternal life, existed in the original garden of Eden, but God banished humanity before they could eat from the "**tree of life.**" When the Son of Man comes, Jesus said that "**the righteous**" will enter "**into eternal life**", which brings God's faithful people back to the "**tree of life**" which God had originally made in the garden. We will reflect more about the tree of life in an upcoming Chapter.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

- 1) From the details that Jesus has given about the time of separation, it becomes clear that all people will appear before the Son of Man to be judged, and that none will be left out.
- 2) People will be separated and judged based on whether they have lived righteously, according to God's will, and have lived lives of love and goodwill toward others.
- 3) Jesus said "**Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.**" This not only reflects God's original plan for humanity in the garden of Eden, but also reveals that there has always been a glorious destiny for all people who love God and live according to His will.



4) The references from the ancient Books of Jeremiah and Isaiah both mention the "fear of Yahweh." Jeremiah wrote that God revealed this about His people "**I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever**"; and Isaiah wrote that the "**root of Jesse**" (Jesus) will be given and have the "**fear of Yahweh.**"

*So, what does it mean to fear Yahweh (God)?*

Throughout this Book, Jesus pointed toward the time of separation, judgement and the wrath of God. Through His teachings and actions, Jesus also revealed just how deeply God cares for those who love him; and He wants people to seek Him and live according to His will. Jesus has also revealed the fate of those who reject God. And so, wisdom recognizes that it would be healthy to fear God, because, it has been reflected that He alone has the power to destroy both body & soul. Therefore, to fear God means to recognize His power with great respect and to deeply love God, just as He loves us.

5) We are not given an explanation for who the "angels" of the devil are. However, knowing the devil was the one who tried to tempt Jesus away from His faith in God, it can be assumed that "his angels" would be those who would try to tempt us away from our faith in God and from living according to God's will.

6) Jesus' promise that the righteous will be reunited with God is also included in the prophecy written in the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 11, where he wrote: "**It will happen in that day that the Lord will set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people.**"

# Anointing Jesus and Betraying Jesus

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 26, Verses 1-25

1 When Jesus had finished all these words, he said to his disciples, 2 "**You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.**" 3 Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas. 4 They took counsel together that they might take Jesus by deceit, and kill him. 5 But they said, "Not during the feast, lest a riot occur among the people."

6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came to him having an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. 8 But when his disciples saw this, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? 9 For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor." 10 However, knowing this, Jesus said to them, "**Why do you trouble the woman? She has done a good work for me. 11 For you always have the poor with you; but you don't always have me. 12 For in pouring this ointment on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 Most certainly I tell you, wherever this Good News is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of as a memorial of her.**"

14 Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests, 15 and said, "What are you willing to give me, that I should deliver him to you?" "They weighed out for him thirty pieces of silver. 16 From that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

17 Now on the first day of unleavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying to him, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?" 18 He said, "**Go into the city to a certain person, and tell him, 'The Teacher says, 'My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'**" 19 The disciples did as Jesus commanded them, and they prepared the Passover. 20 Now when evening had come, he was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples. 21 As they were eating, he said, "**Most certainly I tell you that one of you will betray me.**" 22 They were exceedingly sorrowful, and each began to ask him, "It isn't me, is it, Lord?" 23 He answered, "**He who dipped his hand with me in the dish will betray me. 24 The Son of Man goes, even as it is written of him, but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be better for that man if he had not been born.**" 25 Judas, who betrayed him, answered, "It isn't me, is it, Rabbi?" He said to him, "**You said it.**"

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 26, Verses 1-25

1) This Chapter begins with Jesus reminding His disciples about His upcoming death, and He identified that it would happen during the Passover celebration. The Passover celebration remembers how God saved the people of Israel and delivered them out of slavery in Egypt. God achieved this through Moses, who warned the

Egyptians that if they did not set the Israelites free, God would cause a series of natural disasters and plagues to fall upon Egypt. After the Egyptians had experienced nine of these natural disasters and plagues, the Pharaoh of Egypt still refused to allow the Israelites to go free. God then planned to release one final plague that would kill all the first born in Egypt. However, before this final plague, He instructed Moses to tell the people of Israel that they should sacrifice a lamb and spread its' blood on the lintel and door posts of their homes, to guard them against this final plague. In the ancient Book of Exodus, Chapter 12, Moses recorded the instructions that God commanded them to do, as follows: **"they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household" – "Your lamb shall be without defect, a male a year old. You shall take it from the sheep, or from the goats" – "and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at evening. They shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two door posts and on the lintel, on the houses in which they shall eat it." – "For Yahweh will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood on the lintel, and on the two door posts, Yahweh will pass over the door, and will not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you. You shall observe this thing for an ordinance to you and to your sons forever. It shall happen when you have come to the land which Yahweh will give you, according as he has promised, that you shall keep this service. It will happen, when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of Yahweh's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians, and spared our houses."**

That is why the celebration is known as "the Passover." After this final plague happened, the Pharaoh of Egypt agreed to free the Israelites from their slavery. Moses then led the people of Israel out of Egypt, toward the land that God had promised them. Every year thereafter, the people of Israel celebrated "the Passover" by sacrificing a pure lamb **"without defect"**, to honor God in remembrance of how He saved His people in this way. We will reflect more about the significance of the lamb, **"without defect"**, being sacrificed during Passover in an upcoming Chapter.

2) It is written that, while in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, Jesus was sitting at a table and **"a woman"** poured expensive oil on Jesus' head. Jesus said to His disciples; **"For in pouring this ointment on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial."** The same event is recorded in the ancient Book of Mark. However, in Mark, Jesus is recorded as saying: **"She has anointed my body beforehand for the burying."** In the "Ancestry of Jesus" section of this book, it is written that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), which when translated means "the anointed one." We are not given information in this Chapter about who this woman was, only that she was the one who anointed Jesus. In the Book of Exodus, Chapter 40, God instructed Moses to anoint Aaron and his sons so they could minister as priests. In the ancient Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, Chapter 16, God instructed Samuel to anoint David the shepherd boy to be a King for God, and in the ancient Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, Chapter 19, God instructed the prophet Elijah to anoint Elisha to be a prophet in Elijah's place. It is God who instructs people to anoint other people on His behalf, therefore, God would

have instructed this woman to anoint Jesus; and to support this and her significance, Jesus said "**Most certainly I tell you, wherever this Good News is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of as a memorial to her.**" Jesus indicated that His anointing was done in preparation for His burial, and in the Book of Mark, it is recorded that the ointment was "pure nard." In the ancient Book of Songs of Solomon, we can find references to "spikenard", which is the plant from which the ointment "nard" comes from. In Songs of Solomon, Chapter 4, a reference to spikenard is included in what appears to be a description of God's garden of Eden, and Jesus being welcomed into it. Here is what is written: "**A locked up garden is my sister; my bride; a locked up spring, a sealed fountain. Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates, with precious fruits: henna with spikenard plants, spikenard with saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree; myrrh and aloes, with all the best spices, a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, flowing streams from Lebanon. Beloved Awake, north wind; and come, you south! Blow on my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and taste his precious fruits.**"

**Author's Note:** *Although these Verses from the Songs of Solomon do not clearly identify that this is a description of the garden of Eden, and Jesus being welcomed into it, I have interpreted it as such because: These particular Verses describe a place of absolute beauty which reflects God's garden of Eden. Jesus was anointed with pure spikenard ointment in preparation for His burial, and the description of this glorious garden includes spikenard plants. This place is described as "A locked up garden is my sister; my bride; a locked up spring, a sealed fountain." Therefore, it's a secret, locked up place, and through His death, Jesus would soon be entering into His Father's Kingdom, which is also a secret, locked up place. After Jesus was baptized by John, in Chapter 4, Verse 17, it is written "Behold a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."; and the final Verse states "Let my beloved come into his garden, and taste his precious fruits", which reflects God welcoming Jesus into the garden.*

3) Next, it is written that Judas left the disciples and went to the chief priests to find out how much they would pay him to betray Jesus for them; and it is written that "**They weighed out for him 30 pieces of silver**", as his payment to do so. The ancient prophet Zechariah predicted that God would break His covenant with His people for a price that they were willing to pay. The price predicted by Zechariah was exactly the same price that Judas was paid. Here is what is written in the ancient Book of Zechariah, Chapter 11, Verses 10-12, "**I took my staff Favor, and cut it apart, that I might break my covenant that I had made with all peoples. It was broken in that day; and thus the poor of the flock that listened to me knew that it was Yahweh's word. I said to them, "If you think it best, give me my wages; and if not, keep them." So they weighed for my wages 30 pieces of silver.**" Once Judas had been paid, it is written that "**From that time he sought opportunity to betray him.**"

Zechariah's prophecy that God would break His covenant with His people for 30 pieces of silver was fulfilled when Jesus was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, because, in the next section of this Chapter, Jesus will reveal that He would become the new covenant between God and His people, after His betrayal is complete.

4) While Jesus and His disciples were gathered together for the Passover meal, it is written that Jesus "**was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples. As they were eating, he said, "Most certainly I tell you that one of you will betray me."** This act of betrayal was predicted in the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 41, Verse 9, where it is written; "**Yes my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate bread with me, has lifted up his heel against me."**

5) In response to Jesus' prediction of His betrayal, it is written that the disciples "**were exceedingly sorrowful, and each began to ask him, "It isn't me, is it, Lord?" He answered, "He who dipped his hand with me in the dish, the same will betray me."** This discussion is also recorded in the ancient Book of John. However, in John, we are provided with a few more details of the discussion in Verses 21-30, "**When Jesus had said this, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, "Most certainly I tell you that one of you will betray me."** The disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was at the table, leaning against Jesus' breast. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, and said to him, "Tell us who it is of whom he speaks." He, leaning back, as he was, on Jesus' breast, asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus therefore answered, "**It is he to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it."** So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. After the piece of bread, then Satan entered into him. Then Jesus said to him, "**What you do, do quickly."** Now no man at the table knew why he said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus said to him, "Buy what things we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. Therefore having received that morsel, he went out immediately. It was night."

According to John's description, none of the disciples understood the instructions given by Jesus to Judas. For that reason, no one other than Jesus fully understood what was about to happen after Judas left.

6) Jesus said, "**The Son of Man goes, even as it is written of him."** Jesus had just predicted to His disciples that one of them would betray Him, so with this statement, Jesus was saying that He knew it would happen and that He was prepared to go along with it. In the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 50, Verse 8-9, this too had been predicted by the prophet, when he wrote "**He who justifies me is near. Who will bring charges against me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me! Behold, the Lord Yahweh will help me! Who is he who will condemn me?"**

7) Jesus knew that He would be betrayed, and it has been recorded in previous Chapters that He also knew He was going to die. It has also been reflected in several Chapters about the significance of who Jesus is, in that He is: Son of Abraham, Son of David, Son of Man, Christ the Messiah (the Anointed One), Son of God, Priest of God Most High, and King of God's dwelling place. Jesus' purpose and mission has always been God's plan. Therefore, the one who betrayed Jesus was also one who rejected God's plan, in that he considered his cause (whatever that might have been) to have been greater than God's cause. Consequently, Jesus warned the betrayer "**but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed!**" In the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 45, Verses 9-13, a passage of prophecy is written where God warned against questioning Him and revealed how His plan for Jesus could not be bought or paid for. This is what is written, "**Woe to him who strives with his Maker – a clay pot among the clay pots of the earth! Shall the clay ask him who fashions it, 'What are you making?' or your work, 'He has no hands?' Woe to him who says to a father, 'What have you become the father of?' or to a mother, 'To what have you given birth?'"** Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker says: "**You ask me about the things that are to come, concerning my sons, and you command me concerning the work of my hands! I have made the earth, and created man on it. I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens; and I have commanded all their army. I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will make straight all his ways. He shall build my city, and he shall let my exiles go free, not for price nor reward."**

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The woman who anointed Jesus with nard ointment, also provided an example of expressing love and respect for Jesus, and yet the disciples criticized her for it. What Jesus said in her defense shows us that He always accepts love and respect from those who follow and believe in Him.

2) The agreement that Judas made with the chief priests, is an example of how greed and a stubborn heart can lead people away from God and cause irreversible acts to happen. Greed and a stubborn heart are emotions typically driven and influenced by the things of this world. Alternatively, generosity and a humble heart align with Jesus' teachings; and when practiced, can help us avoid the emotions of greed and stubbornness that can negatively impact the direction of our lives.

3) Jesus spoke openly with His disciples about His betrayal so that they would understand that He was already aware of and had accepted His future suffering.



# The Last Supper

## Part I

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 26, Verses 26-28

26 As they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks for it, and broke it. He gave to the disciples, and said, "**Take, eat; this is my body.**" 27 He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, "**All of you drink it, 28 for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins.**"

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 26, Verses 26-28

*These few Verses of this Chapter provide so much to reflect upon and consider, and they reveal the great depth of God's plan for Jesus and all of humanity. This particular Passover meal that Jesus shared with His disciples is commonly referred to as "The Last Supper."*

1) It is written that "**As they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks for it, and broke it. He gave to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat: this is my body."**" Here Jesus used bread to represent the physicality of His body, which He was willing to share with His disciples, and by extension with all people who choose to follow Him. From "The Last Supper" onward, many people who follow the teachings of Jesus continue to break and share bread in memory and honor of Him. In Chapter 14, we reflected about a man named Saul who later became known as Paul. It was noted that in a dream, God revealed to a man named Ananias that Paul would become God's "**chosen vessel to bear my name before the nations and kings, and the children of Israel.**" Paul did indeed become God's primary vessel, or instrument, for spreading God's Word. He traveled to many foreign countries sharing the message and teachings of Jesus. Paul wrote many Books that are found in a collection of ancient Books known as the New Testament; and these Books were letters of instruction and encouragement to the early followers of Jesus. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Book of Corinthians, Paul wrote and explained what Jesus meant when He broke and shared bread with His disciples; and why it is significant to continue honoring Jesus in the same way. This is what Paul wrote, "**The bread which we break, isn't it a sharing of the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf of bread, we, who are many, are one body; for we all partake of the one loaf of bread.**"

2) Next, it is written that Jesus "**took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "All of you drink it, for this is my blood of the new covenant,"**" In the "Historical Background" section of this book it is written that God made His original covenant with Abraham, when He said to him "**I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your offspring after you.**" In the previous reflections, it was revealed that this original covenant of God with Abraham and his descendants was broken when Judas



betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Jesus now said that His blood would become the new covenant between God and His people.

3) This new covenant is the same one predicted in Daniel's prophesy which was discussed in Chapter 24. The angel Gabriel spoke to Daniel and said "**He will make a firm covenant with many for one week....**" So, Jesus' blood sacrifice fulfilled the covenant that Daniel predicted in his prophesy.

4) To qualify what Jesus meant by saying His blood was the new covenant, He continued "**which is poured out for many for the remission of sins.**" The term "remission" means "forgiveness"; therefore, Jesus was saying that His blood would be "**poured out**" for the forgiveness of the sins of many people. In the ancient Book of Leviticus, Chapter 4, it is written that God revealed to Moses that the people of Israel could obtain forgiveness for their sins through the blood of various animals, "**without defect**", that were sacrificed to God by a priest. These were the instructions given to Moses in the Book of Leviticus regarding a lamb offering: "**If he brings a lamb as his offering for a sin offering, he shall bring a female without defect. He shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and kill it for a sin offering in the place where they kill the burnt offering. The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and all the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar. All its fat he shall take away, like the fat of the lamb is taken away from the sacrifice of peace offerings; and the priest shall burn them on the altar, on the offerings of Yahweh made by fire; and the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin that he has sinned, and he will be forgiven.**"

In His words, Jesus now revealed that His blood is the new covenant between God and His people, which would replace those original animal sacrifice instructions given to Moses, for the forgiveness of sins; and the forgiveness of sin would now be available, because Jesus' blood would be shed once and for all.

5) In Chapter 20, it is written that Jesus told His disciples "**the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.**" The term "ransom" refers to "a price paid for." In Chapter 23, Jesus also referred to Himself when He said "**But he who is greatest among you will be your servant**", and it was reflected that there was another prophesy which Jesus would fulfill to be the servant for many. In this Chapter, Jesus has now revealed the prophesy that He must fulfill to become the servant for many. Jesus came "**to serve**" by giving "**his life as a ransom for many**", in that His blood would be "**poured out for many for the remission of sins**"; to become the new covenant between God and all people, by paying the price for the forgiveness of their sins with His own life. This too was ancient prophesy that Jesus fulfilled, written in the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 53, Verse 10, as follows: "**Yet it pleased Yahweh to bruise him. He has caused him to suffer. When you make his soul an offering for sin, he will see his offspring.**" This prophesy is completed with another Verse in the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 51, Verse 11, where it is written "**Those ransomed by Yahweh will**

**return, and come with singing to Zion; and everlasting joy will be on their heads."** These prophecies align with Jesus' sacrifice, but they also reveal a deeper purpose for His sacrifice too. Yes, Jesus' sacrifice became the new covenant for the forgiveness of sin. However, in addition to that, Isaiah's prophecies revealed that He also paid this price to reunite God with His people, who will return to God and receive everlasting joy because of Jesus' sacrifice on their behalf.

These words of Jesus also fulfill the prophecy of Daniel reflected upon in Chapter 24, where the angel Gabriel said to Daniel "**Seventy weeks are decreed on your people and on your holy city, to finish disobedience, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity.**" The remainder of Daniel's prophecy included in Chapter 24, will be explained in the next Chapter.

6) Reflections about Melchizedek were included in Chapter 22, and it was written that "**Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine: and he was priest of God Most High. He blessed him, and said "blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth."** It was also reflected that David wrote that the Christ would be "**a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.**" Melchizedek brought out bread and wine and gave God's blessing to Abraham, through which all of Abraham's future descendants would receive God's blessing. In the same way, Jesus now shared bread and wine with His disciples, and revealed that His blood is the new covenant through which God's new blessing becomes available to all humanity, from that time forward into the future.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Although the chief priests, scribes & elders intended to put Jesus to death, it is written that they took counsel together to ensure that it would not happen during the Passover for fear that a riot might break out. The reality was that Jesus' death fulfilled those ancient prophecies, which reveals that this event was God's plan, and that it would happen during the Passover, regardless of the conflicting desires of the priests, scribes and elders.

2) Jesus who came to reveal God and Heaven, first to the Israelites and then to all nations, represented a life lived without defect. Therefore, He "**without defect**" provided the sacrifice to replace the animals "**without defect**" that were sacrificed for the forgiveness of sin. The shedding of Jesus' blood became the new covenant through which all humanity could obtain forgiveness for their sin, from Jesus' death forward.

3) It's extremely significant that the event of Jesus' sacrifice would happen during the Passover celebration, because the Passover celebrates how God saved the ancient Israelites from the plague of physical death, through the blood of a sacrificed lamb "**without defect**", and then Moses led them to freedom into God's promised land. In the same way, Jesus' sacrifice during Passover was the blood sacrifice of God's Son, who was "**without defect**", who became the means through which God

saves humanity from spiritual death from that time forward, to be led by Jesus into God's promised Kingdom of Heaven.

4) God's original instructions to Moses were that a priest must sacrifice the animal in order to obtain God's forgiveness for sin. Therefore, it is significant that it was the chief priests who were responsible and enabled the sacrifice of Jesus, which in turn became the new sacrifice for sin.

5) The sharing of bread and wine in the name of Jesus continues to be a tradition for remembering Jesus' sacrifice today; and this tradition is known as "communion." Many people who follow Jesus, honor the significance of His death by partaking in the tradition of "communion" to remind themselves of the enormous price Jesus paid so that God's people could be forgiven, blessed and received into the Kingdom of Heaven through Him.

## Part II

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 26, Verses 29-30

29 "**But I tell you that I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on, until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's Kingdom.**" 30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 26, Verses 29-30

*These two Verses also provide much to reflect upon and consider.*

1) In saying "**But I tell you that I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on**", Jesus was telling His disciples that His death was fast approaching, and from that point on, He was committing Himself fully to the suffering which He was about to endure. In contrast to the pleasure of sharing the last supper with His disciples, Jesus was letting them know that He must now put aside that pleasure and prepare for the fate that lay before Him.

2) Jesus continued "**Until that day when I drink it anew.**" Although Jesus knew His death was close at hand, in saying this He revealed that He also knew it was not the end for Him. Jesus pointed toward the day when He will "**drink it anew**" meaning that He will be drinking from a new and different cup. The cup that He gave His disciples to share was the cup of the new covenant, which represented His blood being poured out for many. This cup of death from which He would drink is the sacrifice He made for the forgiveness of sins for humanity. However, Jesus was now pointing toward a new cup, which is the cup of eternal life, from which He would soon drink from as well.

3) Finally, Jesus finished by saying that He will drink it "**with you in my Father's Kingdom**", revealing to His disciples that they too will enjoy the eternal rewards of this new cup together with Jesus in God's Kingdom. It must be recognized though, that it is because of Jesus' sacrifice that God's Kingdom would become available to His disciples, and by extension, available to all humanity through Him.

4) After Jesus said these words, it is written that they sang a hymn. Hymns are songs that offer praise and thanks to God. It is significant that they would sing a hymn at that moment because, in doing so, they were thanking and praising God for what was about to happen to Jesus. In the ancient book of Psalms, Chapter 118, this event and what was about to unfold were predicted. Here is what is written in Verses 16-24 of Psalms 118, "**The right hand of Yahweh is exalted! The right hand of Yahweh does valiantly. I will not die, but live, and declare Yah's works. Yah has punished me severely, but he has not given me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness. I will enter into them. I will give thanks to Yah. This is the gate of Yahweh; the righteous will enter into it. I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me, and have become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is Yahweh's doing. It is**

**marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that Yahweh has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it!"**

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) God's love for all humanity is revealed in the sacrifice of His Son. Jesus' death paid the ultimate price for the forgiveness of humanity's sin and paved the way to unite us with God in His eternal Kingdom. In the ancient Book of John, Chapter 3, Verse 16, it is written: **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life."** Jesus willingly gave up His life so that humanity could be redeemed in God's Kingdom, regardless of the sins that we may have committed. God's requirement though is that we have faith in Jesus and follow His teachings to receive His gift of eternal life.

2) The good news that the disciples would partake in the cup of eternal life with Jesus is good news for everyone; because this same cup of eternal life is available to all people who believe in Jesus.

3) In singing a hymn together, Jesus and His disciples gave thanks and praise to God for Jesus' impending sacrifice. When we think about what was accomplished through Jesus' sacrifice, we should also give thanks and praise to God for it, and honor Jesus for the price that He paid on our behalf.

## A Place Called Gethsemane

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 26, Verses 31-56

31 Then Jesus said to them, "**All of you will be made to stumble because of me tonight, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'** 32 **But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee.**" 33 But Peter answered him, "Even if all will be made to stumble because of you, I will never be made to stumble." 34 Jesus said to him, "**Most certainly I tell you that tonight, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.**" 35 Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you." All of the disciples also said likewise.

36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to his disciples, "**Sit here, while I go there and pray.**" 37 He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and severely troubled. 38 Then he said to them, "**My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here, and watch with me.**" 39 He went forward a little, fell on his face, and prayed, saying, "**My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not what I desire, but what you desire.**"

40 He came to the disciples, and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "**What, couldn't you watch with me for one hour? 41 Watch and pray, that you don't enter 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 cup can't pass away from me unless I drink it, your desire be done.**" 43 He came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44 He left them again, went away, and prayed a third time, saying the same words. 45 Then he came to his disciples, and said to 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's be going. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand.**"

47 While he was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people. 48 Now he who betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, "Whoever I kiss, he is the one. Seize him." 49 Immediately he came to Jesus, and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed him. 50 Jesus said to him, "**Friend, why are you here?**" Then they came and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. 51 Behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest, and struck off his ear. 52 Then Jesus said to him, "**Put your sword back into its place, for all those who take the sword will die by the sword. 53 Or do you think that I couldn't ask my Father, and he would even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54 How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must be so?**"

55 In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "**Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching, and you didn't arrest me. 56 But all this has happened that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.**" Then all the disciples left him and fled.

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 26, Verses 31 to 56

1) Jesus told His disciples "**All of you will be made to stumble because of me tonight.**" It has been reflected in previous Chapters that to "stumble" meant to lose faith. Here Jesus was predicting that the disciples would lose faith in Him because of the events that were about to unfold that night. The disciples knew that Jesus was the Messiah. However, they may not have fully understood just how Jesus could remain their Messiah if He was arrested and put to death. Even though Jesus had forewarned them that these events were going to happen, they still may have viewed Jesus from a worldly perspective and were not yet able to grasp how Jesus' death was necessary for Him to be the Messiah.

2) Next, Jesus revealed that their stumbling would fulfill an ancient prophecy, saying "**for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'**" This prophecy can be found in the ancient Book of Zechariah, Chapter 13, Verses 6-7, where it is written "**One will say to him, 'What are these wounds between your arms?' Then he will answer, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.' 'Awake, sword, against my shepherd, and against the man whom is close to me,' says Yahweh of Armies. 'Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'**" Jesus was revealing that this prophecy was about Him being "**the shepherd**" and His disciples being "**the sheep of the flock**"; and predicting that they would all scatter away from Jesus, once the events began to unfold that night.

3) After saying these words, Jesus once again reminded His disciples that He would be raised up, and said to them, "**But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee.**" However, for some reason the disciples didn't appear to consider these words from Jesus in their response to Him. Instead, they focused on defending their loyalty and faith to Him, arguing that they would not be made to stumble.

4) Jesus predicted that Peter would in fact deny Him three times that very night, "**before the rooster crows.**" Peter replied, "**Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you**", and it is written that "**All of the disciples also said likewise.**"

5) Next, Jesus and His disciples went to a place known as Gethsemane, and it is written that Jesus "**began to be sorrowful and severely troubled**", saying to three of His disciples "**My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.**" These words express the deep agony and distress that Jesus felt at that moment, and they provide a clear example of how Jesus experienced the depths of human emotion, in the same way that we do, in spite of being the Son of God.

6) Jesus asked His disciples to wait a distance from Him while He prayed, and it is written that Jesus prayed to God, saying "**My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not what I desire, but what you desire.**" He then later prayed again, saying "**My Father, if this cup can't pass away from me**



**unless I drink it, your desire be done"**, and finally, it is written that He **"prayed a third time, saying the same words."** Jesus knew the gruesome details of the fate that lay before Him, but His prayers reflect His obedience to God's will, regardless of this fate. Chapter 53, in the ancient Book of Isaiah, is a very detailed prophecy specifically about how Jesus would suffer and die for the sins of humanity. The cup Jesus knows He must drink from is described in Isaiah Chapter 53, Verses 5-6, as follows: **"But He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way; and Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all."**

7) Before Jesus began praying at Gethsemane, He asked His disciples to **"Stay here, and watch with me."** Jesus returned to His disciples after His first prayer and found them sleeping. Jesus was frustrated with their inability to stay awake and watch with Him, saying to Peter, **"What, couldn't you watch with me for one hour?"**, then Jesus said to Peter **"Watch and pray, that you don't enter into temptation."** Here, Jesus was asking Peter, once again, watch with Him. However, this time He added that Peter should pray so that he would not **"enter into temptation."** Jesus was referring to Peter's temptation to fall asleep. The disciples were tired, but Jesus wanted them to be present and awake while He prayed over the fate that lay ahead of Him. Jesus was demonstrating the importance of prayer, when faced with the most difficult of circumstances, and in the same way, He wanted Peter to watch Him and understand that through prayer, Peter would be able to overcome his desire for sleep. Finally, Jesus said to Peter, **"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"**, to emphasize that the power of the Holy Spirit works through prayer, and yet, it can be compromised by the desires of the flesh.

8) Earlier in this Chapter, it was written that while Jesus and His disciples were together for the Passover meal, Jesus said **"Most certainly I tell you that one of you will betray me."** It was reflected that this act of betrayal was predicted in the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 41, Verse 9, where it is written **"Yes my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate bread with me, has lifted up his heel against me."** Now, when the actual act of betrayal happened, Judas identified Jesus with a kiss. In the ancient Book of Luke this event is also recorded, and in Chapter 22, Verse 48 of Luke, it is written that Jesus was insulted by this action of Judas, saying to him **"Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"** There is another prophecy that predicted Jesus would be betrayed by a close friend, and this one also predicts that He would be insulted by that. This prophecy can be found in the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 55, Verses 12-14, where it is written, **"For it was not an enemy who insulted me, then I could have endured it. Neither was it he who hated me who raised himself up against me, then I would have hidden myself from him. But it was you, a man like me, my companion, and my familiar friend. We took sweet fellowship together. We walked in God's house with company."**

9) A great multitude led by Judas arrived to arrest Jesus, and one of Jesus' disciples drew his sword and cut off the high priest's servant's ear in an offensive attack. Jesus immediately stopped him from attacking further, scolding him saying "**Or do you think that I couldn't ask my Father, and he would even now send me more than twelve legions of angels?**" Jesus knew this was His destiny and He did not want any interference in the operation of God's will. In saying these words, Jesus revealed that God would have responded with force if Jesus were to ask for His help, even at that very moment.

10) Jesus would not call on God for help to reverse the course of His destiny, and interfere with His arrest, saying, "**How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must be so?**" He said this to remind His disciples that His upcoming death was necessary in order to fulfill the prophecies about Him, written in the ancient Books of Scripture.

11) Just as Jesus told the disciples that they would all stumble and lose faith, as was predicted in the ancient prophecy "**Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered**", as soon as Jesus had been arrested, it is written "**Then all the disciples left him and fled.**"

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The disciples were unable to stay awake with Jesus while He prayed, and Jesus' response to that was "**Watch and pray, that you don't enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.**" The failure of the disciples to stay awake reveals basic human nature; and these words of Jesus reveal that it's easy to lose sight of what God requires us to do and instead follow our own desires and be led by temptation. It is therefore important to recognize that our good intentions can easily be overcome by human weakness. Jesus' example of praying and His words provide instruction for us to: I) Be on guard against temptation. II) Pray for strength. III) Put our faith and trust in the Holy Spirit to strengthen us and enable us to overcome the temptations that we face.

2) Some of the ancient Scriptural prophecies fulfilled by Jesus have been reflected upon throughout this book. However, not all prophecies that point toward Jesus are included in the Book of Matthew. There are many other prophecies that Jesus fulfilled, which can be found in the ancient Scriptures. All of these additional prophecies can be found in a combined collection of Books of Scriptures known as the Old Testament. It is insightful to study the Books of the Old Testament and find these other prophecies about Jesus, all of which were written hundreds, and in some cases, even thousands of years before His birth.

# Jesus' Trial

## Part I

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 26, Verses 57-75

57 Those who had taken Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. 58 But Peter followed him from a distance, to the court of the high priest, and entered in and sat with the officers, to see the end. 59 Now the chief priests, the elders, and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus, that they might put him to death; 60 and they found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward, 61 and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.'" 62 The high priest stood up, and said to him, "Have you no answer? What is this that these testify against you?" 63 But Jesus held his peace. The high priest answered him, "I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 Jesus said to him, "**You have said it. Nevertheless, I tell you, after this you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of the sky.**" 65 Then the high priest tore his clothing, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Behold, now you have heard his blasphemy. 66 What do you think?" They answered, "He is worthy of death!" 67 Then they spat in his face and beat him with their fists, and some slapped him, 68 saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who hit you?" 69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the court, and a maid came to him, saying, "You were also with Jesus, the Galilean!" 70 But he denied it before them all, saying, "I don't know what you are talking about." 71 When he had gone out onto the porch, someone else saw him, and said to those who were there, "This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth." 72 Again he denied it with an oath, "I don't know the man." 73 After a little while those who stood by came and said to Peter, "Surely you are also one of them, for your speech makes you known." 74 Then he began to curse and to swear, "I don't know the man!" Immediately the rooster crowed. 75 Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said to him, "**Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.**" Then he went out and wept bitterly.

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 26, Verses 57-75

*Special Note: The specific details of Jesus' betrayal, trial and death were predicted by many different prophets over hundreds of years before Jesus' birth. Even though each prophecy was written at different times by different prophets, they all fit together and predict the events that happened to Jesus within approximately 24 hours. These reflections reference some of those ancient prophecies.*

1) Jesus was taken captive and brought to Caiaphas, to be presented before the council of high priests and elders, who intended to judge Him and put Him to death. It is written that they "**sought false testimony against Jesus.**" Even though many false witnesses came forward, they could not prove that Jesus was guilty of anything. These events around Jesus' trial were predicted and described in two ancient Books

of prophecy as follows: I) Jesus' confidence in God, although surrounded by a council of accusers, was predicted in the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 118, Verses 5-12, **"Out of my distress, I called on Yah. Yah answered me with freedom. Yahweh is on my side. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Yahweh is on my side among those who help me. Therefore I will look in triumph at those who hate me. It is better to take refuge in Yahweh, than to put confidence in man. It is better to take refuge in Yahweh, than to put confidence in princes. All the nations surrounded me, but in Yahweh's name, I cut them off. They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me. In Yahweh's name I indeed cut them off. They surrounded me like bees."** II) The false witnesses who tried to prove Jesus' guilt were predicted in the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 35, Verses 11-12, where it is written **"Unrighteous witnesses rise up. They ask me about things that I don't know about. They reward me evil for good, to the bereaving of my soul."** ("bereaving" meaning to rob, to take away, or to lose).

2) In Chapter 24, Jesus' references to the destruction of the temple were reflected upon, and in the ancient Book of John, Jesus is recorded as saying **"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."** When Jesus said this though, it was reflected that He was in fact referring to the temple of His body being put to death and being raised to life again three days later, rather than the physical destruction of the temple. It is now written that **"two false witnesses came forward"** and accused Jesus of saying **"I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days."** This accusation completely misrepresents what Jesus actually said. It does, however, become the basis for the high priest's case against Jesus. The high priest then applied pressure on Jesus to respond to this accusation, but it is written that Jesus remained silent and **"held his peace."** This was predicted in the ancient book of Isaiah, Chapter 53, Verse 7, where it is written **"He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he didn't open his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he didn't open his mouth."** Reflections in the upcoming Chapters will further explain how Jesus' death and resurrection also represent the destruction and rebuilding of the temple.

3) Frustrated by Jesus' silence, the high priest commanded Jesus, saying **"I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God."** Jesus replied, **"You have said it"**, but then added, **"Nevertheless, I tell you, after this you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of the sky."** In Chapter 8, it was reflected that Jesus most often referred to Himself as the "Son of Man", and in that same Chapter, it was revealed that the prophet Daniel wrote about his vision of the time of judgement, when he saw the "Son of Man" coming with the clouds. The high priest would have been familiar with Daniel's prophecy of judgement, and so he used Jesus' comment to convict Him, saying **"He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses?"** What the high priest didn't know was the explanation that Jesus had previously given to His disciples about Daniel's prophecy, which was reflected upon in Chapter 24. Jesus revealed to His disciples that the Son of Man would indeed be coming for judgement, but also coming to gather God's chosen people together from

all over the world. Therefore, in convicting Jesus, the council members were condemning themselves at the time of judgement.

4) The council reached the verdict that Jesus was "**worthy of death**", and it is written that the council "**spat in his face and beat him with their fists.**" This shameful and specific treatment against Jesus, and how He handled it, was predicted in the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 50, Verses 5-7, "**The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious. I have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, and my cheeks to those who plucked off the hair. I didn't hide my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord Yahweh will help me. Therefore I have not been confounded. Therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be disappointed.**"

5) Earlier in this Chapter, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him three times "**before the rooster crows**", to which Peter replied, "**Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you.**" Just as Jesus predicted though, Peter did deny Him within that time frame, and the details of his three denials were recorded.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus' trial and guilty verdict was based on false accusations, which revealed the dark nature of humanity, as played out through the actions and motives of the high priests and council. Jesus posed a threat to their establishment, their position, and their power within the community. As a result, they were determined to sentence Him to death even though He was innocent. These events provide an example of the control that worldly power and status can have over people, where they can be influenced to commit the worst possible crimes in order to maintain their positions.

2) In the midst of the trial, Jesus declared "**Nevertheless, I tell you, after this you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of the sky.**" In saying this, Jesus was confidently speaking about His future position of authority and the establishment of God's Kingdom at the very time when He was being sentenced to death; and while those accusing Him believed that they were in complete control of His final destiny.

3) The example of Peter's self-confidence and assurance to never deny Jesus, and then his failure to deliver upon his promise, is an example of human frailty. Peter's denying Jesus three times, revealed that even though he had good intentions, he was unable to follow through when faced with fearful circumstances. Recognizing Peter's failure can help us realize that we too can fail when our own faithful intentions are severely tested. It should also be considered though, that immediately after Peter realized his failure, he "**wept bitterly**" with regret. In the ancient Books of the New Testament, we can find additional details about Peter's life after Jesus' death. In fact, Peter himself wrote two of the Books in the New Testament that provide instruction and encouragement for followers of Jesus. In the last Chapter of this book, the significance of Peter's shortcomings and how his faith would finally become

unshakable is recorded and reflected upon. Although Peter's faith may have failed during Jesus' trial, he was deeply regretful and later did great things in Jesus' name. Peter's denial, regret and later transformation provides an example for us to follow. When our faith happens to falter, we can recognize our failure, with regret, sincerely ask God for forgiveness and strength, and then continue to strive toward living according to Jesus' teachings and God's will.

## Part II

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 27, Verses 1-36

1 Now when morning had 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 Pontius Pilate, the governor. 3 Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that Jesus was condemned, felt remorse, 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? You see to it." 5 He threw down the pieces of silver in the sanctuary, and departed. He went away and hanged himself. 6 The chief priests took the pieces of silver, and said, "It's not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is the price of blood." 7 They took counsel, and bought the potter's field with them, to bury strangers in. 8 Therefore that field was called "The Field of Blood" to this day. 9 Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him upon whom a price had been set, whom some of the children of Israel priced, 10 and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

11 Now Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said to him, "**So you say.**" 12 When he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. 13 Then Pilate said to him, "Don't you hear how many things they testify against you?" 14 He gave him no answer, not even one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.

15 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the multitude one prisoner, whom they desired. 16 They had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew that because of envy they had delivered him up. 19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him." 20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes to ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. 21 But the governor answered them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!" 22 Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do to Jesus, who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let him be crucified!" 23 But the governor said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they cried out exceedingly, saying, "Let him be crucified!"

24 So when Pilate saw that nothing was being gained, but rather that a disturbance was starting, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person. You see to it."

25 All the people answered, "May his blood be on us, and on our children!"

26 Then he released to them Barabbas, but Jesus he flogged and delivered to be crucified. 27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, and gathered the whole garrison together against him. 28 They stripped him, and put a scarlet robe on him. 29 They braided a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they knelt down before him, and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on



the head. 31 When they had mocked him, they took the robe off him, and put his clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

32 As they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, and they compelled him to go with them, that he might carry his cross. 33 When they came to a place called "Golgotha", that is to say, "The place of a skull," 34 they gave him sour wine to drink mixed with gall. When he had tasted it, he would not drink. 35 When they had crucified him, they divided his clothing among them, casting lots, 36 and they sat and watched him there.

### **Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 27, Verses 1-36**

1) Judas felt remorse upon seeing Jesus condemned, and tried to return the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. Judas' attempt to return the money was rejected, and so He threw the silver into the sanctuary. Not willing to put the silver pieces into their treasury, it is written that the chief priests **"took council, and bought the potter's field with them, to bury strangers in."** Matthew wrote that this action of the chief priests fulfilled a prophecy that had been **"spoken through Jeremiah the prophet."** Matthew did not write that the prophecy was "written" by Jeremiah, and so we cannot find this specific prophecy written in the ancient Book of Jeremiah. Sometimes prophecy was not written down, and only passed down through generations verbally. However, if we refer back to the reflections from the last Chapter, it was noted that in the ancient Book of Zechariah, Chapter 11, Verses 10-12, the prophet predicted God would break His covenant with His people for 30 pieces of silver, and that prophecy was fulfilled when Judas betrayed Jesus for the same amount. If we continue to read Verse 13, in that same Chapter of Zechariah, the prophet also predicted that this payment would be diverted toward **"the potter"** and the 30 pieces of silver would be thrown in God's house (which was the sanctuary). Here is what is written in the Book of Zechariah, Chapter 11, Verse 13 **"Yahweh said to me, "Throw it to the potter, the handsome price that I was valued at by them!" I took the thirty pieces of silver, and threw them to the potter, in Yahweh's house."** The field which the chief priests bought was known as the potter's field because it was primarily made up of clay, which the potters in those days used. Once purchased, it became known as the **"The Field of Blood"**, as recorded in this Chapter, and it remained a burial site right up to the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it is still known today as "The Field of Blood."

2) Jesus was questioned by the governor, and it is written that the governor knew Jesus had been delivered to him by the council because of their envy. The governor found no cause to punish Jesus and asked the multitude of people gathered **"What then shall I do to Jesus."** The people replied, **"Let him be crucified!"** It is written **"So when Pilate saw that nothing was being gained, but rather a disturbance was starting"** he then said to the people **"You see to it"**, but we also read that **"Jesus he flogged and delivered to be crucified."** Although Pilate washed his hands and declared that he was innocent of Jesus' death, this was not the case at all. In Pilate, we can see an example of a person in power who disregards righteousness

and justice in order to avoid disorder, and then surrenders his integrity to the interests of others. In addition, Pilate's actions provide an example of a person who thinks himself guiltless while committing the greatest of crimes and blaming others for the unjust punishment he enables.

3) Jesus was cruelly mocked and abused from the moment that the governor's soldiers took Him from Pilate to the time when He was crucified. This treatment supports the prophecy written in the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 50, Verse 6, "**I gave my back to those who beat me, and my cheeks to those who plucked off the hair. I didn't hide my face from shame and spitting.**"

4) Upon arriving at the place where Jesus would be crucified, the mockery and cruelty of the soldiers continued, and it is written that "**they gave him sour wine to drink mixed with gall.**" This was predicted in the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 69, Verse 21, where it is written "**They also gave me gall for my food. In my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink.**" Jesus would have relied on His faith in God to endure all that He went through, but if we also include Verses 16-20, together with Verse 21 from the Book of Psalms, Chapter 69, we can find that this prophecy predicted Jesus' faith in God too, as it is written "**Answer me, Yahweh, for your loving kindness is good. According to the multitude of your tender mercies, turn to me. Don't hide your face from your servant, for I am in distress. Answer me speedily! Draw near to my soul, and redeem it. Ransom me because of my enemies. You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor. My adversaries are all before you. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness. I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; for comforters, but I found none. They gave me gall for my food. In my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink.**"

5) When Jesus was crucified, another prophecy was fulfilled from the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 22, Verse 16 "**For dogs have surrounded me. A company of evildoers have enclosed me. They have pierced my hands and feet.**"

6) After the soldiers crucified Jesus, it is written that "**they divided his clothing among them, casting lots, and they sat and watched him there.**" This too was predicted in the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 22, Verse 17-18, "**They look and stare at me. They divide my garments among them. They cast lots for my clothing.**"

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) The deep regret that Judas felt after he saw they were going to crucify Jesus, his confession, saying "**I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood**", and then hanging himself because he had betrayed Jesus, provides evidence that Jesus was innocent and unjustly sentenced to death. Judas' actions and emotional experience also provide us with an extreme example of how people can suffer mentally because of a guilty conscience.

2) The way the chief priests used the silver that Judas returned, not only fulfilled the ancient prophecy written by Zechariah, but has also helped preserve the memory of Jesus' crucifixion and innocence.

3) Jesus' willingness to sacrifice His own life, revealed just how far He was willing to go on our behalf. Jesus Himself revealed that His sacrifice paid the price for the forgiveness of our sin and became the new covenant between God and humanity. The fact that He gave up His life to pay for our sin, is a testimony that living a sinful life is opposite to, and in conflict with, living according to God's will. Therefore, Jesus' life and His teachings provide us with the guidelines needed to live according to God's will, and His death provides our access to be united with God in His Kingdom.

4) When Jesus was being led to "**Golgotha**" the soldiers compelled a man named Simon from Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross for Him. In previous Chapters, Jesus used a reference of carrying a cross when He said, "**If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.**" Jesus used those words as a parable to represent giving up the ways of this world and following after Jesus' teachings. Now, it is recorded that Simon of Cyrene physically carried Jesus' cross on His behalf, which not only provides a physical example of Jesus parable, but also reveals that Jesus knew and predicted this event would happen to Him too. Therefore, Jesus wove that truth into His teachings so that His parable would become clear to us after His death. Carrying Jesus' cross would have been extremely difficult and challenging, and this act illustrates the challenges that may come as a result of denying the things of this world and following after Jesus' teachings.

# Jesus' Crucifixion

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 27, Verses 37-49

37 They set up over his head the accusation against him written, "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS." 38 Then there were two robbers crucified with him, one on his right hand and one on the left. 39 Those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads, 40 and saying, "You who destroy the temple, and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" 41 Likewise the chief priests also mocking, with the scribes, the Pharisees. and the elders, said, 42 "He saved others, but he can't save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if he wants him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 The robbers also who were crucified with him cast on him the same reproach.

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "**Eli, Eli, lima sabachthani?**" That is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 47 Some of them who stood there, when they heard it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." 48 Immediately one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him a drink. 49 The rest said, "Let him be. Let's see whether Elijah comes to save him."

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 27, Verses 37-49

*Special Note: The specific details of Jesus' betrayal, trial and death were predicted by many different prophets over hundreds of years before Jesus' birth. Even though each prophecy was written at different times by different prophets, they all fit together and predict the events that happened to Jesus, within approximately 24 hours. These reflections reference some of those ancient prophecies.*

1) It has been reflected that Jesus' blood would be the new covenant between God and His people, and Jesus used the cup He shared with His disciples to represent that during their last supper. He also knew that it was not the end for Him, pointing His disciples toward the future, saying "**Until that day when I drink it anew**", and telling His disciples that He will drink it "**with you in my Father's Kingdom**"; which revealed that they too would enjoy the eternal rewards of this new cup together with Jesus in God's Kingdom. At the time when Jesus was crucified, it is written that "**there were two robbers crucified with him, one on his right hand and one on the left.**" The promise of Jesus' reward after His death, and that He would be crucified among thieves, was predicted in a prophecy written in the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 53, Verse 12, "**Therefore will I give him a portion with the great, and he will divide the plunder with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death, and was counted with the transgressors.**"

2) While hanging on the cross, it is written that people passing by, the chief priest, Pharisees, scribes and elders, as well as the criminals crucified with Jesus, all mocked and insulted Him, shaking their heads and saying "**He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if he wants him.**" The Book of Mark also records similar insults and mockery being said by the same people, and in the Book of Luke, the rulers and soldiers were also recorded as mocking and insulting Jesus. This too was predicted in the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 22, Verses 7-8 "**All those who see me mock me. They insult me with their lips. They shake their heads, saying, 'He trusts in Yahweh. Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him, since he delights in him.'**"

3) As mentioned in Chapter 23, the ancient Book of Amos is about God's anger and impending wrath against the people of Israel for their turning away from Him and for their acts of injustice. In Chapter 8, Verse 2, of that ancient Book, the prophet Amos wrote "**Then Yahweh said to me, 'The end has come on my people Israel. I will not again pass by them anymore.'**" Further on in that same Chapter 8, Verse 9, the prophet continued to write, "**It will happen in that day,' says the Lord Yahweh, 'that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day.'**" Here, in this Chapter of Matthew, it is written that when Jesus was on the cross "**from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour**", which is also recorded in the ancient Books of Mark and Luke. In Jesus time, the Israelites only measured the hours of the day from dawn until sundown, and they broke those daylight hours into 12. Therefore, the darkness during Jesus' crucifixion began at 12:00 noon, which fulfilled the prophecy predicted in the ancient Book of Amos.

4) Just before dying Jesus cried out "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" In order to reflect upon these words, we must consider that Jesus often spoke about and knew that the time would come when He would be put to death; and He also spoke about and knew that death would not be the end for Him either. Jesus told His disciples that His blood would be "**poured out for many for the remission of sins.**" Knowing this, Jesus still prayed in the garden of Gethsemane "**My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not what I desire, but what you desire.**" Therefore, Jesus knew that His death would be the sacrifice required to fulfill God's new covenant; but at the same time, His prayers in the garden of Gethsemane reveal emotions of fear and perhaps even terror about what He would have to face and endure. The apostle Paul explained Jesus' death, in the Book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Chapter 5, where he wrote, "**But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation**" - "**For him who knew no sin (which is a reference to Jesus) he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**" So, Jesus' death on the cross required Jesus, who knew no sin, to be made sin on our behalf. This is complicated and not easily understood. Jesus paid the price for humanity's sin, through dying for our sins on our behalf so

that we might become righteous and reconciled to God through Him. Therefore, it was necessary for Jesus to endure that experience apart from God, even though it was never Jesus' desire to ever be away from or apart from God at all. Jesus had to endure that moment alone, in order to accomplish God's purpose for Him. This fulfilled another prophecy, found in the ancient Book of Habakkuk, Chapter 1, Verses 12-13, "**Yahweh, you have appointed him for judgement. You, Rock, have established him to punish. You who have purer eyes than to see evil, and who cannot look on perversity, why do you tolerate those who deal treacherously, and keep silent when the wicked swallows up the man who is more righteous than he.**" Therefore, Jesus cry "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**", is an emotional cry out against having to be separated from God in order to complete His sacrifice and God's covenant, because it was never Jesus' desire to ever be away from or apart from God at all.

One of Jesus' disciples named John wrote a letter to the early Christians, after Jesus' death, in which He explained the significance of Jesus' death. In the Book of 1<sup>st</sup> John, Chapter 4, Verses 9-10, He wrote, "**God has sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.**"

5) Jesus' cry "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" are also the very first words written in the first Verse of the ancient Book of Psalms, Chapter 22. Many significant and specific prophecies that were fulfilled during Jesus' crucifixion and death are written in Chapter 22 of the Book of Psalms. Psalms 22 begins with the words "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**", and continues to predict the circumstances surrounding Jesus' crucifixion; however, Psalms 22 does not end there! The prophecy continues after Jesus' death, and in Verses 22-24, it is written "**I will declare your name to my brothers. Among the assembly, I will praise you. You who fear Yahweh, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify him! Stand in awe of him, all you descendants of Israel! For he has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, Neither has he hidden his face from him; but when he cried to him, he heard.**" These Verses are a call for people to praise and glorify God for what has been accomplished through Jesus' death. They also reveal that God did not abandon Jesus on the cross, because, in this prophecy it is written "**Neither has he hidden his face from him; but when He cried to him, he heard.**"

6) In the ancient Book of John, it is written that before Jesus died on the cross "**he said, 'It is finished.' He bowed his head and gave up his spirit.**" The final two sentences in the Book of Psalms, Chapter 22, predict that Jesus crucifixion would complete God's plan, and that it would be remembered for future generations, who would serve Him and declare Jesus' righteousness for what He has done. These are the last two sentences in Psalms, Chapter 22: "**Posterity shall serve him. Future generations shall be told about the Lord. They shall come and shall declare his righteousness to a people that shall be born, for he has done it.**"

## Considerations for people seeking to know God

1) A sign was placed above Jesus' head on the cross, and on it was written, "**THIS IS JESUS KING OF THE JEWS.**" This sign is recorded in all four of the ancient Gospel Books about Jesus' life (Matthew, Mark Luke and John). In the Book of John, the following is also recorded about that sign, "**Many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek.**" This title which Pilate wrote, represented Jesus' purpose for the people of Israel, and it was profound and prophetic that a Roman would write it, and that it would have been seen by many Jewish people, while Jesus hung on the cross. Further on in the Book of John, it is written that "**The chief priests of the Jews therefore said to Pilate, 'Don't write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'he said, 'I am King of the Jews.'"**" Pilate answered, "**What I have written, I have written.**" This is ironic, because regardless of the fact that the chief priests rejected this title for Jesus, they could not stop it from being written and displayed above His head for all to see, and then later to be historically recorded in all four of the ancient Gospel Books.

2) God's plan for Jesus' sacrifice appears to be morally conflicting, and it is challenging for us to understand why God would allow His only Son to be killed as the way to reconcile His people with Him. In the "Historical Background" section of this book, it is recorded that Abraham "**Believed in God**", and because of his belief, God "**credited it to him for righteousness.**" Abraham's faith and belief in God was unconditional, and he was obedient to God's will. In the ancient Book of Genesis, Chapter 22, it is written that God "**tested Abraham**", telling Him to sacrifice His Son Isaac. Abraham took his son to the place where God had told Him and prepared to sacrifice his son for God. As Abraham raised the knife to kill his son, God's angel interfered, saying "**Don't lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.**" Through this mysterious test, Abraham's faith and belief in God was confirmed, and his son was spared. This test of Abraham's faith became prophecy fulfilled when God actually did sacrifice His only Son Jesus. Therefore, what God asked Abraham to do for Him (which He did not allow Abraham to complete), He willingly did for us. As explained by Paul, and noted earlier in this Chapter's reflections, Jesus' was sacrificed "**so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**" Therefore, it is through faith in Jesus and believing that God enabled His death on the cross as payment for our sins, that we can become the righteousness of God and united with Him.



# Jesus' Death

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 27, Verses 50-54

50 Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit. 51 Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The earth quaked and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they entered into the holy city and appeared to many. 54 Now the centurion, and those who 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."

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 27, Verses 50-54

*Special Note: The specific details of the events that happened after Jesus' death were also predicted by many different prophets over hundreds of years before Jesus birth. These reflections reference some of those ancient prophecies.*

1) The three Verses that immediately follow the veil of the temple being torn describe an earthquake and bodies coming out of tombs after Jesus' resurrection, as well as a centurion and others showing great fear at these events. We will reflect on these Verses in the next Chapter, when more details about the time of Jesus' resurrection are provided.

2) At the moment of Jesus' death, it is written "**Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom.**" To understand the significance of this event, we must first reflect upon what the "veil of the temple" was. In Chapter 21, it was reflected that when the ancient Israelite people first moved into the promised land, they settled in Shiloh, and there established the "Tent of Meeting"; which was their place to worship God, where they could experience God's presence, and where they kept the ark of the covenant (which was the original commandments that God gave to Moses). God instructed Moses how to build this "Tent of Meeting" in a very precise way. Within the "Tent", there was to be a designated area which would be the "Most Holy Place." This was where the ark of the covenant would be placed, and where God would dwell whenever His presence descended upon the Tent of Meeting. God required a veil to be placed in front of the ark to separate this "Most Holy Place" from the rest of the Tent of Meeting. In the ancient Book of Exodus, Chapter 26, Verses 33-34, God instructed Moses as follows: "**You shall hang up the veil under the clasps, and shall bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil: and the veil shall separate the holy place from the most holy for you. You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the most holy place.**"

People were not permitted to enter into this "Most Holy Place" because God had warned that if they did, they would die. There was one exception though, and it was known as the day of atonement. Once a year, on this day, a priest would sacrifice one animal for himself and his household and sacrifice another animal for the rest of the

people of Israel, and then make a blood offering to God within the "Most Holy Place" to receive forgiveness for their sins. To protect the priest from dying, he would prepare a cloud of incense that covered the mercy seat within the veil. He would then sprinkle the blood of the sacrificed animals onto and in front of the mercy seat, and then all of the people of Israel would receive God's forgiveness for their sins. The ancient Book of Leviticus, Chapter 16, explains the procedure in detail, and in Verse 17, it is written **"No one shall be in the Tent of Meeting when he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place, until he comes out, and has made atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel."**

In Jesus' time, the temple in Jerusalem replaced the Tent of Meeting, but it too had a veil that separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the temple. At the moment of Jesus' death, it is written **"Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom."** Understanding the historic significance of the veil, helps to understand the significance of it being torn apart. The separation of God from His people by the veil, had been **"torn in two from the top to the bottom."** The atonement for their sins through sacrificed animal blood sprinkled in the Most Holy Place was no longer possible. As previously reflected upon, from that point forward, Jesus' blood became the new atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins; but no longer would it be for the forgiveness of the people of Israel alone, Jesus' sacrifice would atone for all of humanity's sins.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus' sacrifice made a way for all of humanity to access the Kingdom of Heaven and become connected with God. The ancient veil of separation from God was replaced by God's welcoming invitation, through faith and belief in Jesus. In the ancient Book of Jeremiah, Chapter 31, the prophet wrote what God had revealed to him, **"Behold, the days come", says Yahweh, "that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which covenant of mine they broke, although I was a husband to them," says Yahweh. "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says Yahweh: I will put my law in their inward parts, and I will write it in their heart. I will be their God and they shall be my people."** This is the new covenant, by which we can be forgiven of our sins and become the righteousness of God, through having faith and belief in Jesus in our hearts and acknowledging the sacrifice that He made on our behalf.

The ancient Book of Hebrews was a letter of encouragement, written to the early followers of Jesus to help strengthen their faith in Him, and it explains the new covenant of Jesus' blood replacing the old covenant of animal sacrifice. The following are selected, combined writings from Hebrews, Chapters 9 and 10, to provide the full picture: **"Now indeed even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service, and an earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared. In the**

first part were the lamp stand, the table, and the show bread; which is called the Holy Place. After the second veil was the tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant" ... "Now these things having been thus prepared, the priests go in continually into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the services, but into the second the high priest alone, once in the year, not without blood, which he offers for himself, and for the errors of the people. The Holy Spirit is indicating this, that the way into the Holy Place wasn't yet revealed while the first tabernacle was still standing" ... "But Christ having come as a high priest of the coming good things, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify to the cleanness of the flesh: how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without defect to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, since a death has occurred for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, that those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." ... "He takes away the first, that he may establish the second, by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" - "For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us, saying "This is the covenant that I will make with them: 'After those days,' says the Lord, 'I will put my laws on their heart, I will also write them on their mind;" then he says, "I will remember their sins and their iniquities no more." Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. Having therefore, brothers, boldness to enter into the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a great priest over God's house, let's draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and having our body washed with pure water, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering; for he who promised is faithful."

2) Chapter 24 revealed how Jesus spoke about the temple being destroyed, and in three days being raised up again. It was also reflected that he was referring to His death and body being resurrected three days later as a comparison to the destruction of the temple. With the veil of the temple being torn apart at the time of Jesus' death, the original Covenant God made with His people was destroyed. Jesus' prediction of the temple's destruction was actually a prediction of the destruction of the original access to God's forgiveness for sin, through the blood sacrifices offered to God in the temple. Jesus was resurrected three days after His death, just as He predicted, and the blood sacrifices in the temple was replaced by faith and belief in Jesus. Therefore, Jesus' prediction of the temple's destruction and rebuilding three days later was fulfilled!

## Visions of The Prophet Daniel

In Chapter 24, Jesus said "**When, therefore, you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand).**" In Chapter 24, it was reflected that there are three references to "**the abomination of desolation**" that Jesus pointed toward in the Book of Daniel, and they can be found in Daniel, Chapters 9, 11 and 12. In the actual prophetic writings of Daniel, his words are written slightly different from Jesus' reference, as Daniel wrote the "**abomination that makes desolate.**" Therefore, according to the prophecy, it is the abominations themselves that cause desolation. The term "abomination" refers to a detestable act, and this word is used in other ancient Scriptures to refer to disgusting and offensive things or actions that are unacceptable to God. The term "desolation" refers to desertion or abandonment. Therefore the "abomination that makes desolate" is a reference to a detestable act that is unacceptable to God which causes abandonment.

Reflections will now be provided on the three Chapters and visions of Daniel, as interpretations of their meaning, as they align with Jesus' experience and His teachings.

# The Vision of Daniel in Chapter 9

## "The Abomination of Desolation"

The veil in the temple being torn apart at the time of Jesus' death fulfilled part of Daniel's vision in Chapter 9. The final Verse of Daniel, Chapter 9, is Verse 27, and it includes Jesus' reference to the "**abomination of desolation**."

This is what is written in Daniel, Chapter 9, Verse 27: "**He will make a firm covenant with many for one week. In the middle of the week he will cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease. On the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate; and even to the full end, and that determined, wrath will be poured out on the desolate.**"

***Special Note:** The visions given to Daniel are difficult to interpret and yet, Jesus specifically pointed toward the Verses that include reference to the abomination of desolation. Therefore, these Verses would align with Jesus' teachings. Keeping that in mind, these interpretations are inspired by Jesus' experience and His teachings.*

**The interpretations of this Verse, and the other Verses that relate to this vision of Daniel, Chapter 9, are as follows:**

- I) "**He will make a firm covenant with many**": This is the new covenant between God and His people through the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.
- II) "**he will cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease**": As the result of the veil being torn, that separated God from His people within the sanctuary, it was no longer possible to atone for sin through the sacrifice and offering of animal blood sprinkled in the Most Holy Place.
- III) "**On the wing of abominations**": These are the detestable acts committed against Jesus, including His trial, crucifixion and death, all of which were offensive to God. Therefore the separation of God from His people within the sanctuary, and the loss of forgiveness of sin through sacrifice and offering, was the result of the abominations committed against Jesus.
- IV) "**will come one who makes desolate**": God would abandon the sanctuary, and His presence would no longer be accessible behind the veil (In Jesus words from Chapter 24 "**standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)**"); and by extension, the forgiveness of sin would no longer be available through the sacrifices made and offered within the sanctuary.
- V) "**and even to the full end, and that determined**": Forgiveness for sin would no longer be available through the originally accepted form of sacrifice, right up to the

time when the coming end has been completed; and that end has been determined to happen, and yet its time is not known. (According to Jesus' teachings).

VI) **"wrath will be poured out"**: This is the judgement that Jesus taught about which will come at the end.

VII) **"on the desolate"**: This refers to all who have not lived according to God's will. The ancient Book of 1<sup>st</sup> John, is a letter of instruction for those following Jesus and living according to God's will, and it reveals what it means to be **"the desolate."** In 1<sup>st</sup> John, Chapter 2, Verses 15-17, it is written: **"Don't love the world or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the Father's love isn't in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, isn't the Father's, but is the world's. The world is passing away with its lusts, but he who does God's will remains forever."**

VIII) Daniel, Verse 27, is the last Verse of the vision in Chapter 9. However, to interpret the complete vision, the previous Verses 20-24 should also be included. It has been mentioned that the angel who revealed this vision to Daniel came while he was praying to God for mercy and forgiveness for the people of Israel. While praying, the angel Gabriel appeared to him, and in Chapter 9, Verses 20-23, Daniel wrote **"While I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before Yahweh my God for the holy mountain of my God; yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening offering. He instructed me, and talked with me, and said, Daniel, "I have now come to give you wisdom and understanding. At the beginning of your petitions the commandment went out, and I have come to tell you; for you are greatly beloved. Therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision."** – Therefore, since the angel Gabriel appeared to reveal this vision and give Daniel **"wisdom and understanding"** at the time when he was praying, this vision was an answer to Daniel's prayer. Daniel was praying for God's forgiveness and mercy for the sins of the people of Israel, and the angel's vision revealed to Daniel the details of the new covenant of forgiveness and mercy for sin, that God would be providing through Jesus, as described in Verse 27.

In the following Verse 24, Daniel wrote that the angel said to him **"Seventy weeks are decreed on your people and on your holy city, to finish disobedience, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity"**: Here Gabriel was introducing the purpose of the vision, which was to reveal the coming end time when: I) Disobedience to God will be eliminated II) Sinfulness will come to an end, and III) What has been divided because of evil and wickedness will be restored.

The angel continued in Verse 24, saying **"and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy"**: This portion of the vision points toward the new Kingdom of Heaven, after

the end has reached its full completion. When there will be an everlasting Kingdom of righteousness, and ancient visions and prophecies will have been sealed up because they would have all been fulfilled, and Jesus "**the most holy**" will be anointed by God.

And then the final Verse 27 of Chapter 9, is where the angel said to Daniel "**He will make a firm covenant with many for one week. In the middle of the week he will cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease. On the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate; and even to the full end, and that determined, wrath will be poured out on the desolate.**" – This Verse has already been reflected upon, as it related to the veil being torn in the sanctuary.



# The Vision of Daniel in Chapter 11

## "The Abomination of Desolation"

In Chapter 11, Verses 31-32, Daniel wrote this about the vision he saw "**Forces will stand on his part, and they will profane the sanctuary, even the fortress, and will take away the continual burnt offering. Then they will set up the abomination that makes desolate. He will pervert those who do wickedly against the covenant by flatteries; but the people who know their God will be strong, and take action.**"

***Special Note:** The visions given to Daniel are difficult to interpret and yet, Jesus specifically pointed toward the Verses that include reference to the abomination of desolation. Therefore, these Verses would align with Jesus' teachings. Keeping that in mind, these interpretations are inspired by Jesus' experience and His teachings.*

**The interpretations of Chapter 11, Verses 31-32, are as follows:**

I) "**Forces will stand on his part,**": These forces are those working on behalf of God and Jesus.

II) "**and they will profane the sanctuary, even the fortress,**": The term "profane" refers to "unholy" or "not dedicated to holy purposes." Throughout the Book of Matthew, Jesus called out the hypocrisy of the chief priests, because they were not honoring God with their lifestyles and actions, and not representing God's will as priests for the people of Israel. Therefore, they themselves were showing their lack of dedication to holy purposes, which translated into hypocrisy when they performed the ceremonial sacrifices and offerings in the sanctuary. This portion of the Verse may therefore be referring to the chief priests themselves as the ones who "**profane the sanctuary, even the fortress.**"

III) "**and will take away the continual burnt offering.**": This again refers to the forces working on behalf of God and Jesus, who will take away the sanctification that came through the "**continual burnt offering**", which was maintained by the priests in the temple.

In the ancient Book of Exodus, God instructed that a "**continual burnt offering**" be maintained, as an honor to God, at the door of the Tent of Meeting. This "**continual burnt offering**" would have also been maintained in the temple of Jerusalem as well. Here is what is written in the ancient Book of Exodus, Chapter 29, Verses 42-46, "**It shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the Tent of Meeting before Yahweh, where I will meet with you, to speak there to you. There I will meet with the children of Israel; and the place shall be sanctified by my glory. I will sanctify the Tent of Meeting and the altar: Aaron also and his sons I will sanctify, to minister to me in the priest's office. I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. They shall know**

**that I am Yahweh their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them: I am Yahweh their God."**

On a couple of occasions in the Book of Matthew, Jesus pointed the Pharisees toward the writings of the prophet Hosea, where he wrote "**For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.**" Therefore, taking away the "**continual burnt offering**" represents the removal of God's sanctification and His presence in the temple, as His true desire is not to receive sacrifices and burnt offerings, but rather that His people would show mercy to each other and seek the knowledge of God above all.

IV) "**Then they will set up the abomination that makes desolate.**": This means that "**the abomination that makes desolate**" would happen after the "**continual burnt offering**" had been taken away. Therefore, this Verse was revealing a sequence of events that would occur; where one event would "**set up**" the second event. First God's sanctifying presence would be removed from the sanctuary and then the "**abomination that makes desolate**" would occur.

V) "**He will pervert those who do wickedly against the covenant by flatteries;**": In Matthew, Chapter 23, Jesus taught that the scribes and Pharisees loved the flattery that came with their positions. How their actions were performed for public recognition, and their elaborate clothing to enhance their appearance. They loved the honor they received at feasts, having the best seats in the synagogues and being called Rabbi by others. These religious leaders of the people were the same people who did "**wickedly against the covenant**" by condemning Jesus to death. The term "pervert" refers to being "corrupt." Therefore, those who were responsible for Jesus' death were corrupted by their desire for flattery.

VI) "**but the people who know their God will be strong, and take action.**": This speaks to those who truly know God. Therefore, their faith will remain strong, they will follow Jesus' teachings, and they will take action by living according to God's will.

# The Vision of Daniel in Chapter 12

## "The Abomination of Desolation"

In Chapter 12, Verses 11-13, Daniel wrote this about the vision he saw, "**From the time that the continual burnt offering is taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate set up, there will be one thousand two hundred ninety days. Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred thirty-five days. But go you your way until the end; for you will rest, and will stand in your inheritance at the end of days.**"

***Special Note:** The visions given to Daniel are difficult to interpret and yet, Jesus specifically pointed toward the Verses that include reference to the abomination of desolation. Therefore, these Verses would align with Jesus' teachings. Keeping that in mind, these interpretations are inspired by Jesus' experience and His teachings.*

**The interpretations of Chapter 12, Verses 11-13 are as follows:**

These Verses provide two timelines

I) The first time line is: "**From the time that the continual burnt offering is taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate set up**": The time frame between these two events is recorded in this vision as being 1290 days. Based on the Gregorian calendar, which is today's calendar of 365 days a year, 1290 days would translate into approximately three and a half years. We do not have an exact timeline from the beginning of Jesus' ministry until His death, however, it has been widely accepted that His ministry lasted approximately three to three and a half years. This time frame closely aligns with this prophecy of Daniel's vision. Therefore, God's sanctification of the temple, as honored by the "**continual burnt offering**", may have been taken away around the time when Jesus began His teachings. And from Daniel's previous vision, it has been interpreted that the "**abomination that makes desolate**" was Jesus' trial, crucifixion and death; which means that this first time line covers the period from around the beginning of Jesus' ministry and teachings up to the time of His death.

II) The second timeline provided is: "**Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred thirty-five days.**": The difference between 1290 and 1335 is 45 days. The ancient Book of Acts is about the actions of the early followers of Jesus, after His death. In this Book, we are provided with the number of days that Jesus was seen alive after His resurrection, and details are also provided of a promise that He gave to His disciples while He was with them. This is what is written in the Book of Acts, Chapter 1, Verse 1-9, "**The first book I wrote, Theophilus, concerned all that Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day in which he was received up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. To these he also showed himself**

alive after he suffered, by many proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking about God's Kingdom. Being assembled together with them, he commanded them, "**Don't depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which you heard from me. For John indeed baptized in water, but you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now.** Therefore when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you now restoring the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "**It isn't for you to know times or seasons which the father has set within his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.** When he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. While they were looking steadfastly into the sky as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white clothing, who also said, "You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky.""

After this event of Jesus being taken up into a cloud and out of the disciple's sight, the following is written about an experience that the disciples had a few days later in the Book of Acts, Chapter 2, Verses 1-4: "**Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all with one accord in one place. Suddenly there came from the sky a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Tongues like fire appeared and were distributed to them, and one sat on each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak.**"

Daniel's vision stated "**Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred thirty-five days.**" Jesus instructed His disciples to "**wait for the promise of the Father**" which he then explained would be a blessing in the form of being "**baptized in the Holy Spirit.**" Daniel's vision defined a waiting period of 45 days, which closely aligns with the time frame from Jesus' resurrection to when the apostles received their blessing of the Holy Spirit coming upon them.

III) "**But go you your way until the end;**" This is instruction for all who seek God: To continue in the path that Jesus taught and live according to God's will, in order to be accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven.

IV) "**for you will rest, and will stand in your inheritance at the end of days.**" This is the promised inheritance for God's faithful people that Jesus taught about, where they will be received into God's promised Kingdom at "**the end days.**"

# Jesus' Burial

## **The Book of Matthew, Chapter 27, Verses 55-66**

55 Many women were there watching from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, serving him. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. 57 When evening had come, a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself was also Jesus' disciple came. 58 This man went to Pilate, and asked for Jesus' body. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given up. 59 Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut out in the rock, and he rolled a great stone against the door of the tomb, and departed. 61 Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb. 62 Now on the next day, which was the day after the Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together to Pilate, 63 saying, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver said while he was still alive: 'After three days I will rise again.' 64 Command therefore that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest perhaps his disciples come at night and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He is risen from the dead;' and the last deception will be worse than the first." 65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard. Go, make it as secure as you can." 66 So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone.

## **Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 27, Verses 55-66**

*Special Note: The specific details of the events that happened after Jesus' death were also predicted by many different prophets over hundreds of years before Jesus birth. These reflections reference some of those ancient prophecies.*

1) It is written that "**Many women were there watching from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, serving him.**" Three women are specifically named from this group, and they are. I) Mary Magdalene: In the Books of Luke and Mark, Jesus casts out seven demons from Mary Magdalene; and in Luke, Mary Magdalene follows Jesus together with the 12 disciples, while He travels through many cities and villages teaching about God's Kingdom. II) Mary the mother of James and Joses: This was Jesus' mother. In Matthew, Chapter 13, Verses 55-56, when Jesus was teaching in His own synagogue, those who heard him teaching said "**Where did this man get this wisdom, and these mighty works? Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother called Mary, and his brothers, James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?**" III) The mother of the sons of Zebedee: This was the mother of James and John, who were two of Jesus' disciples.

2) It is then recorded that a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, took Jesus' body and laid it in his own tomb, which he had cut out in the rock. This fulfilled another prophecy about Jesus, from the ancient Book of Isaiah, Chapter 53, Verse 9, where it is written, "**They made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man**

**in his death; although he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth."**

3) The chief priests and Pharisees knew Jesus had said that He would rise again after three days. However, they did not believe Him, and feared that the disciples would steal Jesus' body from the tomb and start to spread a rumor about His resurrection. Consequently, they asked Pilate to provide a security guard for the tomb; and he granted them a centurion who sealed the tomb. This act of the chief priests and the Pharisees again show their desperate fear of losing their positions of power and influence over the people, and to what extent they went to try to keep their positions secure.

# Jesus' Resurrection

## Part I

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 28, Verses 1-6

1 Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. 2 Behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from the sky, and came and rolled away the stone from the door, and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 For fear of him, the guards shook, and became like dead men. 5 The angel answered the women, "Don't be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, just like he said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying.

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 28, Verses 1-6

*Special Note: The specific details of the events that happened after Jesus' death were also predicted by many different prophets, over hundreds of years before Jesus birth. These reflections reference some of those ancient prophecies.*

1) This Chapter begins with women returning to see Jesus' tomb after His burial, and it is written, "**Behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from the sky, and came and rolled away the stone from the door, and sat on it. His appearance was like lightening, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him, the guards shook, and became like dead men.**" In the previous Chapter, additional events were also recorded that appear to have happened at this time. This is what is written in Chapter 27, Verses 51-54 "**The earth quaked and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they entered into the holy city and appeared to many. Now the centurion, and those who 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."**"

The centurion, and those with him watching the tomb, witnessed an earthquake, an angel descending from the sky to roll the tombstone away, Jesus' resurrection, and bodies of dead saints being raised and coming out of the surrounding tombs. In response to these miraculous events, it is written that they said, "**Truly this was the Son of God.**"

2) In the ancient Book of Ezekiel, Chapter 37, God showed the prophet Ezekiel a vision; in Verses 1-14, Ezekiel wrote the following about that vision: "**Yahweh's hand was on me, and he brought me out in Yahweh's Spirit, and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. He caused me to pass by them all around: and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and behold, they were very dry. He said to me "Son of man, can these bones live?" I answered, "Lord Yahweh you know." Again he said to me, "Prophecy over**



these bones, and tell them, 'You dry bones, hear Yahweh's word. Thus says the Lord Yahweh to these bones: "Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you will live. I will lay sinews on you, and will bring up flesh on you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you will live. Then you will know that I am Yahweh.'" So I prophesied as I was commanded. As I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, there was an earthquake. Then the bones came together, bone to its bone. I saw, and, behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the wind, prophecy, son of man, and tell the wind, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh: "Come from the four winds, breathe, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up on their feet, an exceedingly great army. Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost. We are completely cut off.' Therefore prophecy, and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh: "Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, my people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. You will know that I am Yahweh, when I have opened your graves, and caused you to come up out of your graves, my people. I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live. Then I will place you in your own land; and you will know that I, Yahweh, have spoken it and performed it," says Yahweh.'" "

This appears to be a complicated prophecy to interpret, and yet it reflects the teachings of Jesus. In this vision, the transformation from "**dry bones**" to life began with God commanding the "**Son of Man**" to "**Prophecy over these bones, and tell them, 'You dry bones, hear Yahweh's word.'**" Jesus previously referred to the "dead" as being those who do not accept His teachings; and He taught that the transformation from death to life is made possible through faith in Him and following His teachings. In Ezekiel's vision, the dry bones become resurrected through the Son of Man prophesying over them, which reflects Jesus' ministry of teaching God's Word. The vision also included God saying, "**I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live.**" This reflects the new covenant, where God will write His laws on the hearts of His people, through their faith in Jesus. Jesus taught that there will be a time when death is conquered and replaced with everlasting life for those who love God and live according to His will; and in Ezekiel's vision, he wrote that God said, "**Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, my people; I will bring you into the land of Israel.**" This "**land of Israel**", reflects the new Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven; where all of God's people will be united with Him through Jesus, the "**Son of Man.**"

Ezekiel's vision also resembles the event of the saints being raised after Jesus' resurrection; and their resurrection provided physical evidence of God's power and how, through Jesus, the dead can be raised to life.

3) It is written that an angel spoke to the women who came to see Jesus' tomb and told them not to be afraid, saying, "**I know that you seek Jesus, who has been**

**crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, just like he said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying."** There are several ancient prophecies that predicted Jesus would be resurrected after His death. I) In the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 53, Verse 11, the prophet wrote **"After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light and be satisfied. My righteous servant will justify many by the knowledge of himself; and he will bear their iniquities."**

In Chapter 16 of this book, it was reflected that the word "Sheol" is a Hebrew word meaning "death", when translated into English. These next three prophecies specifically mention "Sheol" in their predictions. II) In the Book of Psalms, Chapter 49, Verse 15, the following is written **"But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me."** III) The Book of Psalms, Chapter 16, Verses 7-11, not only predicted God would not abandon Jesus in death, but would also reward Him with the path of eternal life. This is what is written, **"I will bless Yahweh, who has given me counsel. Yes, my heart instructs me in the night seasons. I have set Yahweh always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices. My body shall also dwell in safety. For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, neither will you allow your holy one to see corruption. You will show me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy. In your right hand there are pleasures forever more."** IV) And in the Book of Psalms, Chapter 30, Verses 1-3, it is written **"I will extol you, Yahweh, for you have raised me up, and have not made my foes to rejoice over me. Yahweh my God, I cried to you, and you have healed me. Yahweh, you have brought up my soul from Sheol. You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit."**

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) In the previous Chapter, it was described that the chief priests & Pharisees tried to make Jesus' tomb secure, in order to control any rumors from spreading about Jesus' resurrection. This is an important point to consider; because not only were they unable to interfere with Jesus' resurrection and God's plan, but their recorded actions provide evidence of their failed attempt to control the outcome, and they add proof to the resurrection of Jesus.

2) Believing that Jesus was buried and then resurrected to life, just as He had predicted, can comfort any fears that we might have about our own death and burial. Having confidence in this truth, and Jesus' teachings, can excite us about our own future eternal life together with God in His Kingdom of Heaven.

3) The resurrection of the saints reveals God's power and provides support for Jesus' teachings that death is not the end for those who love God and live according to His will.

## Part II

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 28, Verses 7-10

7 Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead, and behold, he goes before you into Galilee; there you will see him.' Behold, I have told you."

8 They departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word. 9 As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "**Rejoice!**" They came and took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

10 Then Jesus said to them, "**Don't be afraid. Go tell my brothers that they should go into Galilee, and there they will see me.**"

### Reflections on Chapter 28, Verses 7-10

1) An angel told the women to go quickly to Jesus' disciples, and let them know that "**He has risen from the dead, and behold, he goes before you into Galilee; there you will see him.**" In the Book of Mark, the angel is recorded as saying, "**tell his disciples and Peter, He goes before you into Galilee. There you will see him, as he said to you.**" In Mark's record the angel singled out Peter by name, instructing the women to tell him specifically. There have been several events involving Peter, throughout this Book of Matthew, and it may be helpful to review some of them here again briefly:

I) In Chapter 14, Jesus called Peter out of a boat to walk on water toward Him. Although Peter was able to walk on the water at first, he became distracted by the strong wind, afraid and started to sink. He cried out to Jesus to save Him, and Jesus immediately took hold of Him, saying, "**You of little faith, why did you doubt?**"

II) In Chapter 16, Jesus asked His disciples "**who do you say that I am?**" and it was Peter who said, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" Jesus responded to Peter's reply, saying "**Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven.**" Jesus continued, saying to Peter, "**I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my assembly**" (it was reflected that "**my assembly**" referred to people who become followers of Jesus' teachings through faith, and live according to God's will). The reflections on these words that Jesus said to Peter are included here again for review:

First, Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter, which represents a transformation, in the same way that a new follower of Jesus transforms into a new person of faith in God. Giving Simon a new name, pointed toward his spiritual transformation into a new person of faith. Secondly, because of Peter's faith, he accepted what God had revealed to him, and knew who Jesus was. Therefore, it is through faith, that God communicates and works through people. Thirdly, Peter was compared to a stone that came from a larger mass of rock (which represents God), meaning that he was now one of God's people. And finally, Jesus pointed to the faith which Peter had, as being the means by which He will build and grow His assembly of people, all of whom will be set on "this Rock", which is God, through their faith.

III) In Chapter 26, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him three times on the night of His arrest, but Peter rejected that, saying "**Even if I must die with you, I**

**will not deny you."** As predicted, Peter did in fact deny Jesus three times, however, immediately after he realized what he had done, he "**wept bitterly**" with regret.

In each one of these past experiences, Peter's faith has been the central focal point concerning his relationship with Jesus, whether it be in his believing or his unbelieving.

***Special note:** We will reflect further on Peter's faith in the next section, after the disciples go to Galilee and meet with Jesus.*

2) The Book of Psalms, Chapter 2, is a prophecy that predicts Jesus' crucifixion, God's impending wrath, and provides God's instructions for redemption.

I) Verses 1-3 predict Jesus' trial, crucifixion and the chief priests and Pharisees plotting to cover up His resurrection, "**Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth take a stand, and the rulers take counsel together, against Yahweh, and against His Anointed, saying, "Let's break their bonds apart, and cast their cords from us."**

II) Verse 4 predicts God's response to their foolishness, "**He who sits in the heavens will laugh. The Lord will have them in derision."**

III) Verses 5-9 reveals God's wrath toward those who are against Him, and that His response will be carried out through His Son as follows: "**Then he will speak to them in his anger, and terrify them in his wrath. Yet I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion." I will tell of the decree. Yahweh said to me, "You are my son. Today I have become your father. Ask of me, and I will give the nations for your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron. You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."**

IV) Finally, in Verses 10-12, God instructs the unrighteous how they can avoid their destruction, "**Now therefore be wise, you kings. Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve Yahweh with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Give sincere homage to the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish on the way, for his wrath will soon be kindled. Blessed are all those who take refuge in him.**

If we now return to the scene of Jesus' tomb, it is written that the angel told the women to go tell the disciples about Jesus' resurrection, and "**They departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy.**" As they ran, they met Jesus on the way, and it is written that "**They came and took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them "Don't be afraid."** It is important to note that, rather than embracing Jesus upon seeing Him resurrected and alive, they fell to His feet and worshipped Him in fear. The behavior of the women provides an example of following God's instructions found in the prophecy of Psalms, Chapter 2, because their emotions were both fearful and joyful for Jesus, they honored Him by falling to His feet and worshipping Him, and they took refuge in Him when He told them "**Don't be afraid."**

3) As soon as the women met Jesus on their way He said to them "**Rejoice!**" This too reflects God's instructions from Psalms, Chapter 2, as God instructed His people to "**rejoice with trembling.**"

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) In the events involving Peter, we can see a clear example of God's relationship with those who love him. Peter's faith in Jesus was not always strong, but Jesus' faith in Peter was unfailing. Peter listened to God's voice through his heart, and through his heart and by faith he knew who Jesus was. In Peter, we can see the reality of our own short comings, but God is always faithful, and He will always welcome those who seek Him and do His will.

2) Jesus told the women to "**Rejoice!**" This was because they were seeing Jesus risen from the dead, just as He had predicted they would. It has been reflected that Jesus' resurrection was predicted by many of the ancient prophets, as found in ancient Scriptures, and Jesus' resurrection fulfilled those prophecies. Therefore, the ancient prophets predicted this truth, which they had written down in faith, believing that those prophecies had been revealed to them by God.

The ancient Book of Hebrews was written after Jesus' resurrection, and in Chapter 10 of that Book, faith is defined as follows: "**Faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of things not seen.**" Hebrews, Chapter 10, goes into great detail describing many specific circumstances where people relied on their faith in God, throughout history, and were rewarded for it. In Verse 6, it is written "**Without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to him, for he who comes to God must believe that he exists, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him.**" Because of Jesus, we too can "**Rejoice!**", because, through faith in Him, we can receive the rewards of God's promises. In Matthew, Chapter 10, Jesus explained the necessary condition for people to receive their recognition of worth from God, when He said, "**Everyone therefore who confesses me before men, him I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven.**" Jesus further warned though that, "**whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before my Father, who is in heaven.**" Therefore, we can be thankful for and "**rejoice**" over Jesus, because through having faith in Him, we have one who speaks to God on our behalf.

3) There has been a constant thread throughout Jesus' teachings, and the ancient Scriptures, about God's wrath upon those who don't live according to His will. We understand that God and Jesus are both loving and merciful. However, it is critically important to keep God's almighty power in our minds and remember that Jesus is our mediator. As instructed in Psalms, Chapter 2, we must "**Serve Yahweh with fear, and rejoice with trembling.**" We must fearfully respect God and realize that our future promise of eternal life and joy is a gift from Him, that comes through Jesus. In the ancient Book of Proverbs, Chapter 1, Verse 7, it is written "**The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge; but the foolish despise wisdom and instruction.**"

## Part III

### The Book of Matthew, Chapter 28, Verses 11-17

11 Now while they were going, behold, some of the guards came into the city, and told the chief priests all the things that had happened. 12 When they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave a large amount of silver to the soldiers, 13 saying, "Say that his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. 14 If this comes to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and make you free of worry." 15 So they took the money and did as they were told. This saying was spread abroad among the Jews, and continues until today. 16 But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had sent them. 17 When they saw him, they bowed down to him, but some doubted.

### Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 28, Verses 11-17

1) The guards told the chief priests what they had witnessed at Jesus' tomb. The chief priests then assembled with the elders to decide how to respond to what the guards had said. Their collective response was to pay the guards to **"Say that his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept."** There are several reflections to consider regarding their decision. I) It is unlikely that Roman guards would allow themselves to sleep, after being commissioned to keep watch over the tomb, and yet, this was the story that they agreed to tell, in exchange for their silver payment. II) The fact that the counsel consciously chose to ignore the miraculous events that the guards had witnessed, further proves their stubbornness and refusal to accept that Jesus was who He claimed to be. III) The lie that the counsel paid the guards to tell was in fact the reason why they had the tomb guarded in the first place. In Chapter 27, it is described that they feared Jesus' disciples would steal His body from the tomb and spread a rumor about His resurrection. Ironically, the rumor that they were originally trying to avoid became their own rumor, to try to discredit the truth of Jesus' resurrection. IV) Finally, this act of the chief priests and elders, once again showed their desperate fear of losing their positions of power and influence over the people, and the extent to which they would go to keep their positions secure.

2) The eleven disciples went to Galilee and met with Jesus, and it is written that **"When they saw him, they bowed down to him, but some doubted."** Matthew does not go into detail about why some doubted that it was Jesus. However, if we refer to the three other Books about Jesus' life, we can find some additional information that may provide some insight into their doubts.

I) In the Book of Mark, Chapter 16, after Mary told the disciples that she had seen Jesus, it is written, **"When they heard that he was alive, and had been seen by her, they disbelieved. After these things he was revealed in another form to two of them, as they walked, on their way into the country. They went away and told it to the rest. They didn't believe them, either. Afterward he was revealed to the eleven themselves as they sat at the table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they didn't believe those who had seen him after he had risen."**

II) The Book of Luke provides even more details about when Jesus revealed Himself **"in another form"** to those two men walking **"on their way into the country."** The event is recorded in Luke, Chapter 24, Verses 13-17, as follows **"Behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty stadia from Jerusalem. They talked with each other about all of these things which had happened. While they talked and questioned together, Jesus himself came near, and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him."** He said to them, **"What are you talking about as you walk, and are sad?"**

The men then explained that Jesus had been crucified, and that they had hoped He would have been the one to have redeemed Israel. They further explained, that women had told them Jesus was alive, and they checked and saw that the tomb was empty but did not find any further proof for themselves. Jesus continued to walk with them to their destination, and when they arrived, Jesus joined them inside and revealed Himself to them. In Verses 30-31, it is written, **"When he had sat down at the table with them, he took the bread and gave thanks. Breaking it, he gave to them. Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished out of their sight."**

After Jesus vanished, the two men returned to Jerusalem, and told the eleven disciples that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, and that He had been with them, but they only recognized Him after He broke the bread. It is then written in Verses 36-46, **"As they said these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be to you." But they were terrified and filled with fear, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. He said to them, "Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is truly me. Touch me and see, for a spirit doesn't have flesh and bones, as you see that I have."** When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they still didn't believe for joy, and wondered, he said to them, **"Do you have anything here to eat?"** They gave him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. He took them, and ate in front of them. He said to them, **"This is what I told you, while I was still with you, that all things which are written in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me must be fulfilled."** Then he opened their minds, that they might understand the Scriptures. He said to them, **"Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day."**

III) In the Book of John, after hearing that Jesus had risen from the dead, but before actually seeing Jesus, the disciple Thomas is recorded in Chapter 20, Verse 25, as saying **"Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."** Eight days later, Jesus appeared to the disciples when Thomas was among them, and He said to Thomas in Verse 27, **"Reach here your finger, and see my hands. Reach here your hand, and put it into my side. Don't be unbelieving, but believing."** Then Jesus said to Thomas, in Verse 29 **"Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed."**



3) It was written in Luke that the two men walking to Emmaus did not realize it was Jesus who had joined them, because **"their eyes were kept from recognizing him"**; and later when Jesus broke bread with them, it is written that, **"Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him."** Earlier in Chapter 11, Matthew recorded Jesus as criticizing multitudes of people for not recognizing who both John the Baptist and Jesus really were, after which He said, **"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you hid these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to infants."** Jesus also said in Chapter 11, **"No one knows the Son, except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and he to whom the Son desires to reveal him."** Jesus said these words when He was addressing a multitude of people who did not believe in Him or believe in His miracles. In the same way, the men who walked with Jesus could not recognize Him either, because they too did not believe in the miracle that Jesus had truly risen from the dead.

4) After the disciples had met up with Jesus in Galilee, Jesus and Peter had a conversation that is recorded in the Book of John, Chapter 21, Verses 15-17, where it is written, **"So when they had eaten their breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, Son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you.' He said to Him, 'Feed my lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you have affection for me?' Peter was grieved because he asked him the third time, 'Do you have affection for me?' He said to him, 'Lord, you know everything. You know that I have affection for you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'**

In the same Book of John, Chapter 10, Verses 14-16, Jesus is recorded as saying, **"I am the good Shepherd. I know my own, and I'm known by my own; even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice. They will become one flock with one shepherd."**

In Chapter 16, when Jesus called Peter "Son of Jonah", it was because God had spoken to Peter to reveal who Jesus really was in the same way that God had spoken to Jonah. In these Verses from the Book of John, Chapter 21, it is written that Jesus again referred to Peter as **"Son of Jonah."** This time, however, He was comparing Peter to Jonah because God had called Jonah to preach to the people of Nineveh to turn away from their sins, because God intended to destroy them because of their wickedness. Similarly, Peter was now being called to **"Tend"** and **"Feed"** Jesus' **"Lambs"** and **"Sheep."** To tend and feed Jesus' lambs and sheep was to preach Jesus' teachings to others. Just as Jonah was called to preach the message of God's wrath upon Nineveh, Peter was also being called to preach Jesus' teachings about God's wrath and redemption. However, because of Jesus, Peter also had a new and joyful message to share; Peter's preaching would also include the Kingdom of Heaven, eternal life and the forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus.



In previous Chapters, it was reflected that Psalms, Chapter 78 predicted that God would return to **"His people"** to provide their promised inheritance through David, who would shepherd them by the integrity of his heart, and from that point forward the inheritance of God's people came through the integrity of their hearts - meaning their faith and belief in God - as was demonstrated by David. It was also reflected that this section of Psalms 78 prophetically pointed toward Jesus, because Jesus was a direct descendant from the line of King David. Jesus was here revealing that He is the new shepherd for God's people by the integrity of their hearts, through their faith and belief in Him. And through Jesus, God's people would receive their promised inheritance of eternal life.

In Chapter 14, Jesus performed the miracle of feeding more than 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish. If we recall, the disciples suggested to Jesus that He should send the people away to find food, to which Jesus replied **"They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat."** It was reflected that those words from Jesus were prophetic about the future of His disciples, which they may not have understood at the time. The feeding of the five thousand was an opportunity for the disciples to witness and participate in the power of God at that moment, but now Jesus was calling Peter, and by extension all of His disciples, to **"feed my sheep"**, which meant to feed people spiritually by sharing Jesus' teachings, which is the true bread from Heaven. And as their shepherd, all of His followers will become one flock, to be led into the Kingdom of Heaven through Him.

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) Jesus physically appeared to His disciples, however, it was only through faith that they were able to believe it was really him; simply seeing Him was not enough to know that it was Jesus. Just as the disciples had to rely on their faith to know it was Jesus, we too must rely on our faith to know Jesus and accept that He will help us on our journey, as we seek a relationship with God.

2) Jesus said to Thomas, **"Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed."** In saying this, Jesus was teaching a very important lesson. One of the most significant obstacles against people believing in God is their requirement to first "see" some sort of "proof of God" before they are willing to believe. Like Thomas, many people refuse to believe in God, simply because of their own internal beliefs. Jesus' words to Thomas, however, clearly state, **"Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed."** Once again, this type of belief is based entirely on faith.

In Chapter 5, it was reflected that the first twelve Verses of Jesus' teachings were known as "The Beatitudes." This Verse from the Book of John **"Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed"**, has sometimes been referred to as "The Tenth Beatitude."

3) The history of the men who could not recognize Jesus while He walked with them, provides a clear example of how people can be completely blind to what might be right in front of them, and showcases how faith without unbelief is the key instrument through which God and Jesus are revealed to humanity.

4) Throughout this book, the events involving Peter provide a clear picture of how God works through those who have faith in Him and Jesus. Although Peter's faith failed Him, and he even denied Jesus after His arrest, these situations helped to strengthen his faith. Peter may have denied Jesus three times, but finally he affirmed his faith and love for Jesus three times at the moment when he was being called to preach Jesus' teachings.

5) It was because of Peter's complete faith, that he was able to teach others to have faith in Jesus too. As people came to have faith in Jesus, they too shared their faith with others, which in turn grew Jesus' assembly of faithful followers. Through this process, Jesus' assembly grew and does still continue to grow around the world today. Peter relied on Jesus to be his Shepherd and teacher, and in the same way, we too can rely on Jesus to be our Shepherd and teacher. Therefore, by following Jesus' teachings, we become the sheep of His flock, and by extension, the sheep of God's flock.

# Jesus' Instructions

## The Book of Matthew, Chapter 28, Verses 18-20

18 Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "**All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**" Amen.

## Reflections on Matthew, Chapter 28, Verses 18-19

1) Jesus told His disciples, "**All authority has been given to me in Heaven and on earth.**" In the original Greek text of Matthew, the word "authority" was translated from "exousia", which also translates as "Power." In Chapter 11, Jesus referred to God as "**Father, Lord of heaven and earth.**" Therefore, Jesus was saying that He had been given all authority and power in Heaven and on earth from God. Earlier in this Chapter, a vision from Ezekiel was reflected upon, which aligned with Jesus' teachings. In that vision, the transformation from "**dry bones**" to life began with God commanding the "**Son of Man**" to "**Prophecy over these bones, and tell them, 'You dry bones, hear Yahweh's word.'**" Jesus previously referred to the "dead" as being those who do not accept His teachings; and He taught that the transformation from death to life is made possible through faith in Him and following His teachings. In Ezekiel's vision, the dry bones became resurrected through the Son of Man prophesying over them, which reflects Jesus' ministry of teaching God's Word. The vision also included God saying, "**I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live.**" This reflects the new covenant, where God will write His laws on the hearts of His people, through their faith in Jesus. Jesus taught that there will be a time when death is conquered and replaced with everlasting life for those who love God and live according to His will; and in Ezekiel's vision, he wrote that God said, "**Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, my people; I will bring you into the land of Israel.**" This "**land of Israel**", reflects the new Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven; where all of God's people will be united with Him, through Jesus, the "**Son of Man.**"

In saying "**All authority has been given to me in Heaven and on earth**", Jesus was confirming that He was the one through whom God's people will be brought into the Kingdom of Heaven, as predicted in the prophecy of Ezekiel.

2) In Chapter 13, Jesus said "**every scribe who has been made a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a householder, who brings out of his treasure new and old things.**" In saying this, it was noted that a scribe was a person who studied and taught the ancient Holy Scriptures. Jesus was the one who taught about the Kingdom of Heaven, therefore, a scribe "**who has been made a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven**", was a scribe who understood and taught Jesus' teachings as well as the ancient Scriptures. The "**treasure**" is his knowledge,

the "**new things**" are the teachings of Jesus, and the "**old things**" are the teachings of the ancient Holy Scriptures; and when this disciple "**brings out his treasure**", he is sharing his knowledge of both new and old teachings with others.

It is now written that Jesus instructed His disciples to "**Go, and make disciples of all nations.**" This is very significant, because He is instructing His disciples to spread Jesus' teachings to all nations throughout the whole world.

3) Jesus continued His instructions for making new disciples, saying, "**baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**" In Chapter 3, it was reflected that the term "baptize" meant "to be spiritually cleansed" or "purified." The phrase "**In the name of**" is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "by authority of." Therefore, Jesus' disciples were being instructed to spiritually cleanse other people, through the act of baptism, and that they have been given the authority to do so by God, by Jesus and also by the Holy Spirit.

4) Jesus continued to say, "**teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you.**" These words completed Jesus' instructions to His disciples. Jesus required His disciples to go out into all nations to find new people who would listen and be willing to learn about God's Word and Jesus' teachings. To spiritually cleanse them by the authority of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And finally, to teach these new disciples all that Jesus had commanded them to do. Therefore, these new disciples would also be required to do the same, which would in turn, continue to make new disciples in all nations of the world.

5) Jesus' final words were "**Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**" In Chapter 18, Verse 20, Jesus said, "**For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the middle of them.**" It was reflected that, with those words Jesus was promising that whenever people gather together in His name, Jesus Himself would be present among them in a spiritual form. Jesus was now adding to that promise, saying that He will always be spiritually present among His followers, right up to the end of the age.

6) In previous Chapters, it has been reflected that the "end of the age" would be a time of judgement, and in Chapter 25, Jesus said this about the Son of Man during that time, "**Before Him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.**" In the final verse of Chapter 25, Jesus revealed the destiny of humanity after this separation, when He said that those on the left "**will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.**" In the ancient Book of Genesis, when God drove man and woman out of the garden of Eden, it was reflected that there was a reason why they were cast out. In Genesis, Chapter 3, Verse 22, it is written: "**Yahweh God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand, and also take of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever--' Therefore Yahweh God sent him out from the garden of Eden.**" In Chapter 2 of Genesis, Verse 9, it is written that God made "**the tree of life in the**

**middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."**

Therefore, the **"tree of life"**, that provides eternal life, existed in the original garden of Eden; but God banished humanity before they could eat from the **"tree of life."** When the Son of Man comes, Jesus said that **"the righteous"** will enter **"into eternal life"**, which brings God's faithful people back to the **"tree of life"**, which God had originally provided for them in the garden of Eden.

The ancient Book of Revelation is a Book of prophecy about the end of the age and it also mentions the **"tree of life."** This Book was written by Jesus' disciple John, and it begins with: **"This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things which must happen soon, which he sent and made known by his angel to his servant, John, who testified to God's word, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, about everything that he saw."** The rest of the Verses and Chapters of the Book of Revelation that follow are the prophecy itself, that describe the details of the end of the age. The final Verses, written in the last Chapter of this Book are: **"Now I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who had shown me these things. He said to me, "See you don't do it! I am a fellow bondservant with you and with your brothers, the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." He said to me, "Don't seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. He who acts unjustly, let him act unjustly still. He who is filthy, let him be filthy still. He who is righteous, let him do righteousness still. He who is holy, let him be holy still."**

**"Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last. The Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the assemblies. I am the root and the offspring of David; the Bright and Morning Star."** The Spirit and the bride say, **"Come!"** He who hears, let him say, **"Come!"** He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely. I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, may God add to him the plagues which are written in this book. If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book. He who testifies these things says, **"Yes, I come quickly."** Amen! Yes, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints. Amen!"

### **Considerations for people seeking to know God**

1) In Chapter 10, when Jesus was first sending His disciples out to preach about the Kingdom of Heaven, He said to them, **"for most certainly I tell you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man has come."** The

reflections on that Chapter indicated that the full meaning of this sentence may not have been completely clear to His disciples. The disciples may have understood that Jesus would follow them, and physically come afterward to help them reach the people of Israel. However, in saying "**you will not have gone through the cities of Israel**", Jesus was saying that they would not be able to reach all people in the cities of Israel; in addition to that, "**the cities of Israel**" may have also represented "all of God's people." Jesus' words "**until the Son of Man has come**" represented a point in the future, where His disciples would be able to reach all people, with Jesus' help. Now, in this Chapter 28, it is written that Jesus' final words to His disciples were "**Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**" These words completed Jesus' instructions to His disciples about making new disciples of all nations. Jesus' disciples did indeed make new disciples, who in turn continued to make new disciples, all of whom having Jesus' presence with them. Therefore, in this way His disciples could effectively reach all of God's people, throughout all nations, until the end of the age. These final instructions and words of Jesus may help explain what He meant back in Chapter 10.

2) Jesus said in Chapter 18, "**For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the middle of them.**" In this last Chapter, He has further promised "**Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**" These are very powerful promises that Jesus has given us to consider. He has promised to be a living presence in our lives, and that He will enter into a personal relationship with whoever calls on His name.

3) Jesus spoke these final words to His disciples, to encourage them to spread His teachings to all nations; and the disciples were responsible in the years after Jesus' death for spreading Jesus' teachings and growing His assembly of faithful followers. The disciples faced extreme persecution, just as Jesus predicted they would, and yet it was their faithful work and actions that were responsible for expanding the foundation of faith and belief in Jesus. Therefore, the lives and actions of the twelve disciples offer us an example of following Jesus and living according to God's will.

Through the efforts of Jesus' followers, His teachings continue to spread around the world today approximately 2000 years later. This fact alone can provide us with encouragement to have faith and believe in Jesus, to share His Holy teachings, and to do all that He commanded His disciples to do.

# The Holy Spirit

## Book of Matthew – Jesus’ Teachings About The Holy Spirit

In Jesus’ final words to His disciples, He instructed they “**Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**” In this Book of Matthew, we have reflected on the Holy Spirit, and the following references have been included for review:

- Jesus' mother became pregnant with Jesus by the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus after He was baptized
- Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by the devil
- Jesus cast out demons and unclean spirits through the power of the Holy Spirit
- Jesus said “**blaspheme against the Spirit will not be forgiven men... whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come.**”
- Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would be speaking through them, on their behalf, during difficult times, saying “**For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.**”
- While in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus revealed to His disciples that temptation can be overcome through the power of the Holy Spirit, if they rely on the Spirit instead of their own strength. He said “**The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.**”
- Jesus instructed His disciples to “**Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**”

## More of Jesus’ Teachings About The Holy Spirit

In addition to the teachings from the Book of Matthew, Jesus provided several other teachings about the Holy Spirit, all of which can be found in the three other Books about Jesus’ life (the Books of Mark, Luke and John). These are a few of Jesus’ teachings about the Holy Spirit from two of those Books:

Luke, 10, Verse 21: **Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children."**

John, Chapter 3, Verses 5-8 : Jesus said "**Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into God's Kingdom. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Don't marvel that I said to you, "You must be born a new. The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but don't know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."**

John, Chapter 6, Verse 63: "**It is the spirit who gives life. The flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and are life.**"



John, Chapter 14, Verse 15-17: **"If you love me, keep my commandments. I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever, – the Spirit of truth, whom the world can't receive; for it doesn't see him, neither knows him. You know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you."**

John, Chapter 14, Verse 26: **"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you."**

John, Chapter 16, Verse 7-12: **"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I don't go away, the Counselor won't come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. When he has come, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgement; about sin, because they don't believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to my Father, and you won't see me anymore; about judgement, because the prince of this world has been judged. I have yet many things to tell you, but you can't bear them now."**

John, Chapter 16, Verse 13-15: **"However when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak from himself; but whatever he hears, he will speak. He will declare to you things that are coming. He will glorify me, for he will take from what is mine, and will declare it to you. All things whatever the father has are mine; therefore I said that he takes of mine, and will declare it to you."**

### **Teachings About The Holy Spirit From The Apostle Paul**

The apostle Paul also wrote many teachings about the Holy Spirit, to provide us with further insight about how the Holy Spirit can be a living force within us. These are a few of Paul's teachings from various books that he wrote.

In the Book of Galatians, Chapter 5, Verses 16-17, Paul wrote **"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you won't fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, that you may not do the things that you desire."**

Paul continued in Galatians, Chapter 5, Verses 22-25, writing **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts. If we live by the Spirit, let's also walk by the Spirit."**



In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Book of Corinthians, Chapter 1, Verses 21-22 Paul wrote **“Now he who establishes us with you in Christ, and anointed us, is God; who also sealed us, and gave us the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts.”**

Paul continued in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Chapter 3, Verse 3-5, writing **“being revealed that you are a letter of Christ, served by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone, but in tablets that are hearts of flesh. Such confidence we have through Christ toward God; not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as servants of a new covenant.”**

In the Book of Romans, Chapter 8, Verse 10-11, Paul wrote **“If Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”**

In 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Chapter 5, Verse 17, Paul wrote **“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new.”**

### **Ancient Prophecy About The Holy Spirit From Jeremiah**

In the Book of Jeremiah, Chapter 31, Verses 31-33, the prophet Jeremiah wrote **“Behold the days come,” says Yahweh, “that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which covenant of mine they broke, although I was a husband to them,” says Yahweh.**

**“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says Yahweh: I will put my law in their inward parts, and I will write it in their heart. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”**

### **Reflections on the Teachings of the Holy Spirit**

- Jesus’ taught to turn away from focusing on the things of this world and toward focusing on His teachings and the things of Heaven. When we do this the Holy Spirit can dwell within us.

- When the Holy Spirit dwells within us, Jesus referred to that experience as **“being born a new”**. To be born a new is to accept the Holy Spirit into our hearts and to allow the Holy Spirit to guide our lives along the path which Jesus taught.

- Jesus said **“I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor”**. This **“counselor”** is the Holy Spirit. In the original Greek text the term “counselor” is written as the word “paraclete”, which has also been translated as “helper” and “advocate”.

- Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will convict the world about sin, righteousness and judgement. The word “convict” means to be declared guilty of an offense. Therefore, the Holy Spirit provides a moral compass which declares those things that are sinful and those that are righteous.

- Jesus taught that we must be **“born a new”** in order to enter into Heaven, and this “re birth” is when the Holy Spirit dwells within us. Paul expanded upon that teaching stating that as a result we become **“a new creation”** and the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will also live within us.

## **Considerations on the Holy Spirit for people seeking to know God**

- Jesus said **“It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I don't go away, the Counselor won't come to you ... I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever... You know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you.”** This is the Holy Spirit who dwells within our hearts, as foretold by God and written by the prophet Jeremiah. God’s new covenant for humanity, was completed through the sacrifice of Jesus, so that the Holy Spirit could be sent to dwell within us so that we may become God’s people.

- Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will convict the world about sin, righteousness and judgement. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit lives within us He counsels and reveals to us all things that are sinful and righteous happening around us. More importantly though, He reveals to us our own sinfulness, which then helps us to change and transform our behavior according to what the Holy Spirit has shown us.

- The Holy Spirit does not speak from himself but reveals the will of God and Jesus to us in order to provide us with direction for our lives. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as **“the Spirit of truth”**. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is revealing truths to us about the world and about ourselves.

- The Holy Spirit is willing to both counsel and help us, but we are also influenced by the desires of our flesh, which Paul taught are contrary to that of the Spirit. Indeed, the Spirit is not only our counselor, but when we rely on the Holy Spirit, He too will provide us with the strength that we need to help us overcome the desires of the flesh.

- The more we rely on the Holy Spirit the more we become filled with and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. In the book of Philippians, Chapter 4, Verse 13, Paul wrote **“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”**

- Jesus taught God knows our needs before we even ask and so by relying on the council of Holy Spirit we allow God's plan for our lives to unfold while he provides for our needs.

# The Lord Is My Shepherd

In Chapter 27, it was reflected how the Book of Psalms, Chapter 22, provided a detailed prophecy of Jesus' crucifixion, predicted the circumstances surrounding His death, and continued after Jesus' crucifixion with Verses that call people to praise and glorify God for what had been accomplished through Jesus' sacrifice. The final two sentences in Psalms, Chapter 22, predicted that Jesus' crucifixion would complete God's plan, and that it would be remembered by future generations who would serve Him and declare Jesus' righteousness for what He has done.

King David wrote Psalms, Chapter 22, but he also wrote Psalms, Chapter 23. This Chapter in the Book of Psalms, which immediately follows Chapter 22, summarizes the life for those who follow Jesus, and it reveals the promise that God has for those who do.

## The Book of Psalms, Chapter 23 - The Lord Is My Shepherd

Yahweh is my shepherd:  
I shall lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.  
He restores my soul.  
He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death  
I will fear no evil, for you are with me.  
Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil.  
My cup runs over.  
Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in Yahweh's house forever

## Reflections and Considerations on Psalms 23

Keeping Verses 14-16, from the Book of John, Chapter 10 in mind, where Jesus said: **"I am the good Shepherd. I know my own, and I'm known by my own; even as the Father knows me, and I know the father. I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice. They will become one flock with one Shepherd"**, and if we refer to Jesus' teachings from the Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the following reflections and considerations may help to put the Verses of Psalms, Chapter 23, into perspective.

**Yahweh is my shepherd:**

King David wrote Psalms 23, approximately 1000 years before Jesus' birth, and this first line revealed that David knew God was shepherding his life. In the Verses 14-16 from the Book of John, Chapter 10, Jesus testified that He came to be the shepherd for God's people, but what exactly does it mean to be a shepherd? A shepherd is one who watches over, takes care of, and leads his flock to a place where they can be nourished. Through following Jesus, His flock falls under Jesus' care and becomes spiritually nourished, while His teachings lead them to God. Using sheep as an analogy for people is powerful because, like sheep, people can be stubborn and easily lead astray. But those who follow Jesus become of one mindset and one flock, who accept and know that Jesus is shepherding their lives.

### **I shall lack nothing:**

The sheep of Jesus' flock will be provided for. In Chapter 6, Jesus taught His disciples saying, "**Therefore I tell you, don't be anxious for your life: what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor yet for your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothing? See the birds of the sky, that they don't sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you of much more value than they?**" In saying this, Jesus was teaching not to be concerned about the necessities of life, urging His disciples to trust in God's care. Jesus pointed to the fact that God provides for the necessities of all creatures on earth, and then revealed that God will provide for the needs of people too, who are much more precious to Him than all other creatures. Further on in Chapter 6, Jesus expanded on this teaching by saying "**seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness**" and He promised that if they do, "**all these things will be given to you as well.**"

### **He makes me lie down in green pastures:**

This Verse expands upon the previous Verse. To "lie down" represents both comfort and security, and for sheep, "green pastures" represent not only nourishment but nourishment in abundance. Therefore, Jesus' followers will experience joyful comfort and security, knowing that they're being spiritually nourished from the source that is eternal. In the ancient Book of John, Chapter 4, Jesus is recorded speaking with a woman beside a well. In Verses 13-14, Jesus said to her "**Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.**" Later in John, Chapter 7, Verse 38, it is also written that Jesus said, "**He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, from within him will flow rivers of living water.**"

### **He leads me beside still waters:**

"Still waters" represent the calmness and peace that will be experienced by Jesus' followers.

### **He restores my soul:**

To restore a person's soul is to forgive their sins completely. Those who follow Jesus are rewarded with forgiveness of their sins, because as was reflected, Jesus' death was the atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin for all humanity.

**He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake:**

In Matthew, Chapter 28, Jesus' final words to His disciples were "**Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**" This promise aligns with this Verse, as Jesus will be present in the lives of His followers, to guide them along a path of righteousness. To follow "**in the paths of righteousness for his names sake**" represents honoring Jesus and His authority, by living righteously and according to His teachings.

**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death:**

Jesus taught that living a life focused on the things of this world leads to death. Therefore, to "**walk in the shadow of the valley of death**" is to acknowledge that we live in a world surrounded by mortal influences that don't lead to everlasting life.

**I will fear no evil, for you are with me:**

This is a continuation of the last sentence, acknowledging that although we live in this mortal world, evil forces are not to be feared, because of Jesus' constant presence in the lives of His followers.

**Your rod and your staff, they comfort me:**

Earlier in Chapter 28, it was reflected that the Book of Psalms, Chapter 2, Verses 5-9, predict God's impending wrath upon the unrighteous will be carried out through His Son, who "**shall break them with a rod of iron.**" Therefore, Jesus' followers can take comfort in knowing that He will prevail over the unrighteous in the end. However, Psalms 23 is about the personal relationship that His followers have with Jesus.

This Verse is a continuation of the three previous Verses, where His followers acknowledge living in a world of temptations that lead to death, and yet are not afraid of those evil forces, because Jesus' presence is with them and He guides them in the paths of righteousness. Through prayer and having faith without unbelief, His followers can also take comfort in Jesus' "**rod**" of strength that will crush evil and temptations which try to invade their lives.

A staff is a tool that a shepherd uses to manage their sheep and help guide their flock in the direction that he wishes them to go. Therefore, Jesus "**staff**" is a comfort too, because His followers know that He is guiding and leading them along the right path. Jesus' final words to His disciples in this Book of Mathew are "**Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age**", which is an extended promise to all of His followers, because He is promising that His presence will always be with them "**even to the end of the age.**"

**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies:**

This sentence refers to the grace that will provide for the needs of Jesus' followers, in spite of the fact that they may be surrounded by those who oppose them.

**You anoint my head with oil:**

In Chapter 26, it is written that a woman anointed Jesus' with oil before He was arrested. It was also reflected that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) which when translated means "the anointed one." In the Book of Exodus, Chapter 40, God instructed Moses to anoint Aaron and his sons, so they could minister as priests. In the ancient Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, Chapter 16, God instructed Samuel to anoint David the shepherd boy to be a King for God. In the ancient Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, Chapter 19, God instructed the prophet Elijah to anoint Elisha to be a prophet in Elijah's place. Therefore, historically, God instructed people to anoint others on His behalf. This sentence in Psalms 23, reveals that God appointed Jesus to anoint His followers on God's behalf.

**My cup runs over:**

Jesus' follower's needs will be provided for in abundance, beyond their expectation

**Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life,**

This confidently states that "**goodness and loving kindness shall follow**" Jesus' followers throughout their lives. The term "follow" is a translation from the original Hebrew text "לרדוף", which can also be translated as "pursue" or "chase after." In many Chapters, throughout the Book of Psalms, God's love is described as "**unfailing love.**" Therefore, once a person becomes a follower of Jesus, goodness and God's unfailing love and kindness will pursue after them throughout their lives.

**and I will dwell in Yahweh's house forever:**

This is Jesus' promise to His followers, that they will receive the reward of everlasting life, in God's eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

# Summary

## The Kingdom of Heaven

*Throughout the Book of Matthew Jesus taught in parables about the Kingdom of Heaven. The following summary is provided for reflection and consideration on those parables.*

The parable of the farmer sowing seed revealed how people receive the Word of God. With some, the seed of God's Word never grows, with others it starts to grow but then fades because of social pressures or worldly interests. However, the seed of God's Word does grow and mature in some people to the point where they live according to God's will and share their faith with others.

The parable of the mustard seed and yeast revealed that the understanding of God's Word begins as a small instrument of change which grows to spiritually transform a person into someone new – A person of faith.

Jesus compared discovering the Kingdom of Heaven with discovering hidden treasure or a fine pearl, that once found, a person would be willing to sell everything they had in order to keep it. This showed that the true value of the Kingdom of Heaven is far greater than anything else that could be owned in this world. And, by comparing the Kingdom of Heaven with hidden treasure, Jesus revealed that the knowledge of the Kingdom of Heaven is something hidden, that people must seek in order to find it.

The parable of the wheat and weed seeds taught that evil weed seeds from the enemy of God are sown amongst the good wheat seeds of God, which revealed that people are faced with both righteous and wicked influences, and that both evil and good people live together in this world.

The parable of the sea net revealed that one day both good and evil people would be gathered together and separated from each other. Regarding this separation, Jesus' disciples asked Him "**who then can be saved?**", and His response was "**With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible**", meaning that eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven is a gift from God, and that it is only possible to receive this gift from God.

The parable of the master of the household seeking laborers for his vineyard represented God continuously seeking out people to bring them to faith and share His Word with others. Those who he finds to labor for Him are all rewarded equally in the Kingdom of Heaven, regardless of how long they have had faith or how much they have labored for Him.



The parable of the vineyard farmers and the master's servants was about tending God's vineyard, the people of Israel. The farmers cultivating the plants represented those in positions of influence, who would teach and lead the people to become good fruit, or faithful people of God. The master's servants were the prophets whom God had historically sent to prophesize God's will to the people of Israel; and the parable revealed that many of these prophets were rejected, beaten and killed, by the farmers. Finally, the master sent his own son, the heir of the vineyard, expecting that the farmers would show him respect. However, instead, they plotted and killed him as well; which represented God's Son Jesus being rejected and killed. After Jesus finished telling this parable, He asked the chief priests and elders **"When therefore the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?"** and they replied that he will **"destroy those miserable men, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will give him the fruit in its season."** Jesus replied **"Therefore I tell you, God's kingdom will be taken away from you, and will be given to a nation producing its fruit."** This statement revealed that God's Kingdom was no longer solely reserved for the people of Israel, and is now available to all people from all nations.

The parable of the King's marriage feast was about God's invitation to His chosen people into the Kingdom of Heaven, and yet they would not come. God continued to reach out to His people over time, however, Jesus said that the people **"made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise "** meaning, they rejected the offer and chose to follow their own interests. So, the King said to his servants **"Go therefore to the intersections of the highways, and as many as you may find, invite to the marriage feast."** This represents God making the Kingdom of Heaven accessible to all people and sending His servants around the world to invite everyone to follow God's Word and live according to His will, so that everyone could partake in the rewards of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said **"Those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good. The wedding feast was filled with guests."** Jesus continued **"But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who didn't have on wedding clothing, and he said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here not wearing wedding clothing?"** Here the King called the man **"friend"** but then questioned how he came in not wearing wedding clothing. This is significant, because he was not asking "how he got in there", he was questioning why he was not dressed appropriately. And the guest was cast out because he was not properly prepared. Which meant that all people are welcomed and invited into God's Kingdom. However, people must be prepared when they arrive into the Kingdom of Heaven, so that they may be accepted by God.

The parable of the wedding feast was about being fully prepared to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. In this parable, the virgin's lamps represented the Word of God, the bridegroom represented the Son of Man, and the wedding feast represents the Kingdom of Heaven. The foolish virgins had some oil, but they were not fully prepared with enough oil to light their path all the way into the feast. On the other hand, the wise virgins had fully prepared their lamps, and were able to accompany

the bridegroom into the feast. This parable expands upon the parable of the unprepared guest without wedding clothes and reveals what it means to be prepared. Being prepared is to know and fully understand God's Word. Therefore, it is not enough to partially understand God's Word; God requires that we have a full understanding of His Word in order to be accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven. The emphasis was also on the need to be fully prepared in God's Word before the Son of Man comes, because once He has arrived, it will be too late for those who have not prepared themselves in advance. Jesus confirmed that this parable is indeed about being prepared before the Son of Man comes, because he finished this parable with a warning, saying "**Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is Coming.**"

So what does it mean to be prepared and understand God's Word fully? The scribes and Pharisees were very knowledgeable in God's Word, found in the ancient Scriptures, but this was not the complete Word of God. Jesus' parable of the scribe who was a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven who brings out of his treasure new and old things, revealed what it means to be prepared and fully understand God's Word. On this parable it was reflected that a scribe was a person who both studied the ancient Scriptures of God and then taught those Scriptures to others. However, Jesus pointed toward a particular type of scribe, one "**who has been made a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven**", meaning a scribe who also understands and teaches about the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus' teachings are about the Kingdom of Heaven, which were new and not found in the ancient Scriptures. Therefore, Jesus was pointing toward scribes who would also be disciples of Jesus' teachings. Jesus said this type of scribe "**is like a man who is a householder.**" In the original text of Matthew, the word "**householder**" was translated from the Greek word "oikodespotes" which can also be translated as "the master or head of a house or family." Therefore, the scribe being like "**a householder**", was a parable for a scribe who would be a master in the knowledge of the ancient Scriptures as well as Jesus' teachings. Jesus continued "**who brings out of his treasure new and old things**". The "**treasure**" is this knowledge that he has, the "**new**" things are the teachings of Jesus, and the "**old things**" are the teachings of the ancient Scriptures. Therefore, when this scribe "**brings out his treasure**", he is sharing his knowledge of both new and old teachings with others.

Being fully prepared in the Word of God to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven is to be knowledgeable in the teachings of both the ancient Scriptures, found in the Old Testament section of the Holy Bible, as well as Jesus' teachings, found in the New Testament section of the Holy Bible.

The parable of the lord entrusting his goods to his servants, while he went on a journey, is about God's expectations of His people. Jesus explained that the lord gave a portion of his worth to each of his servants to manage. However, each servant was not given the same portion. Jesus said that they were given "**each according to his own ability.**" The servants were given currency from their lord, which represented the knowledge of God's Word, and by extension, their faith in God. In Chapter 5, Jesus taught that God's people are the salt and light of the world. Like salt, God's

people can enhance the lives of others by sharing with them their knowledge of God's Word. By sharing their knowledge of God's Word, they are shedding God's light on those who live in spiritual darkness. In this parable, the lord praised the efforts of the servants who increased the value of their lord's worth, saying "**Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things.**" These words praise the "faithfulness" of each servant, which enabled them to increase their lord's worth. Their reward was to "**Enter into the joy of your lord**", which represents entering into the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven. Next, the lord approached the servant to whom He gave the smallest portion of currency to manage, and he was only able to return that which was originally given to him. The lord's response was "**You ought therefore to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back my own with interest.**" Depositing it with the bankers to gain interest, represented growing his own faith by seeking and increasing his own knowledge of God. The lord was accusing the servant of not increasing his own gift of faith and knowledge for himself, regardless of the fact that He chose not to share it with others. As a consequence of the unfaithful servant's behavior, the lord said, "**Throw out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**" Therefore, God requires that those who have been given faith and some understanding of God's Word, increase their faith and knowledge, and share God's Word with others, to the extent of which they are able.

Therefore, through these combined parables we have been provided with a picture of the Kingdom of Heaven and what it means to be prepared to enter into this Kingdom as follows:

The knowledge of God and the Kingdom of Heaven is hidden, but it can be found by anyone who seeks to know God. This knowledge of God is revealed through Jesus' teachings and God's Word in ancient Scripture, and it starts to grow in a person like a seed. This knowledge continues to grow as a person seeks to know more, and as their faith and understanding of God's Word increases, through this knowledge, a person becomes spiritually transformed into someone new (a person of faith). Many influences are present, while people seek to know God, which can steer them away from their path of understanding and their realization that the Kingdom of Heaven is truly greater and more valuable than anything else on earth. However, for those who are faithful and determined to seek God, they will be given understanding so that they too can share their faith and God's Word with others. In doing so, they are doing God's work and God's will is accomplished on earth. Everyone who lives according to God's will and shares His Word will be equally rewarded in the Kingdom of Heaven. Their reward in Heaven is a gift of eternal life, and it is only possible to receive this gift from God.

## **Abraham's Covenant**

In the beginning of this book we looked at the "Historical Background" of the Israelite people and began with the Book of Genesis and the history of a man named Abram. It is written that God spoke to Abram and said; "**Leave your country, and**

**your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and I will curse him who curses you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."** Further on in the Book of Genesis, God made Abram a promise saying: **"Look now toward the sky, and count the stars, if you are able to count them. So will your offspring be."** It is written that Abram **"believed in God"** and because of his belief, God **"credited it to him for righteousness."**

God made a covenant with Abram to provide him with a promised land as an inheritance for his offspring. Later God spoke to Abram again regarding this covenant, saying; **"As for me, behold, my covenant is with you. You will be the father of a multitude of nations. Your name will no more be called Abram, but your name will be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you. Kings will come out of you. I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your offspring after you."**

The apostle Paul was instrumental in spreading God's Word and the teachings of Jesus, and he wrote many books of the New Testament. In the Book of Galatians, Chapter 3, Paul refers to God's covenant with Abraham and reveals how it was completed through Jesus in the following Verses:

**6 Even so, Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." 7 Know therefore that those who are of faith are children of Abraham. 8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Good News beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you all the nations will be blessed." 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham ... 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith ... 16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his offspring. He doesn't say, "To descendants", as of many, but as of one, "To your offspring", which is Christ ... 22 But the Scripture imprisoned all things under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe ... 23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, confined for the faith which should afterwards be revealed. 24 So that the law has become our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. 26 For you are all children of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to promise.**

## Author's Salvation Prayer

*I would like to conclude this book with words of Scripture combined together with my personal thoughts, inspired by the Holy Spirit, in the form of a prayer as follows:*

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me  
For you are with me Lord  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.  
God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son  
That whoever believes in Him  
Should not perish but have eternal life  
With men this is impossible  
But with God all things are possible  
Listen for the voice of the Lord  
Turn and follow the voice of the Lord  
Enter into the joy of the Lord