

November 1 : Scriptures Luke 21-24

SUMMARY

As we open today's reading, we start with the poor woman's offering, which we've talked about before. According to Jesus, the true value of a gift to God is determined by the level of sacrifice required (21:4).

As with Matthew and Mark, we reach the Olivet Discourse, Jesus' End Times seminar. As before, Luke shares many of the same teachings as the other two Gospel writers. However, Luke has a few things that are different that help us distinguish between the events that happened in the 1st century and those that will occur at the end.

Again, we read that the world will go through international and inter-kingdom conflicts, natural disasters, and cosmic signs. But *before* these things happen, the disciples will be persecuted and hauled before courts and kings, but this is for God's purpose – to give Jesus' disciples prime opportunities to bear witness to Jesus and His salvation (21:13). Of course, the disciples are already thinking "But what will I say when that happens?" Jesus is already ahead of them. He tells them they won't have to worry about that, and they shouldn't sweat planning what they're going to say because "I will give you such words and a wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict."

I can say that I've been in a few situations where I had no time to prepare talking points about my faith or organize a message, and the Holy Spirit stepped right in and gave me great stuff to share. I kept thinking, "This stuff is good, and I need to remember this!" Thanks, Holy Spirit.

But just because the Holy Spirit gives us something to say doesn't mean it'll be received well. After assuring His disciples of the Holy Spirit's help, Jesus tells them to prepare for persecution. However, He will preserve them through their time of trial. Sometimes endurance is the best we can do, and that's enough.

And now we come to something interesting. Some scholars think Jesus' prophesied End Time events were fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Roman army arrived in Jerusalem to put down the First Jewish Rebellion. I believe that claim is partially valid because Jesus tells His disciples, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that its desolation has come near," and "They will be killed by the sword and be led captive into all the nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (21:20, 24).

Indeed, the Roman army surrounded and destroyed Jerusalem per Jesus' prophecy, "See, your house is left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:38), and as Luke records, Jerusalem's destruction and trampling are "because these are days of vengeance to fulfill all the things that are written" (21:22). Jerusalem became a hell-hole under the Roman siege, and many Jews fled if they could. But this is where I differ from the scholars I just mentioned. They claim that *all* of Jesus' End Times prophecies were fulfilled in A.D. 70, *including Jesus' return*. What? Where is Jesus now? Those who hold to this position say Jesus rules in the hearts of His disciples, which He does, and *that* constitutes God's kingdom on earth. Therefore, Christians will increasingly grow in numbers until we influence the entire world for Jesus, *and only then will Jesus physically return to rule the whole world*.

I disagree with their position. Why? Jesus very clearly says He will return physically and with what appears to be clouds per Daniel 7:13, Luke 21:27, and Acts 1:8-11. There is no way to spiritualize that. Further, Jesus says there is no way anyone will miss His return (Luke 17:24). However, many will be mistaken about what His return actually is (Islam says a being coming from the sky will be the Mahdi's adversary, and some secular people talk about aliens coming down to guide us). Since Jesus didn't physically return to set up His Jewish kingdom, and yet the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, a *split* has to be seen in Jesus' prophecy.

Luke 21:20-24a – Jerusalem will be destroyed, and the Jews will be killed and exiled.

Luke 21:24b – Gentile nations will lay claim to Jerusalem for a time, but that time will end. Did the Gentiles trample on Jerusalem after the Roman attacks in A.D. 70 and 135? Yes. After Rome destroyed Jerusalem in the First Jewish Rebellion, they allowed Jews to continue living in the city. However, after the Second Jewish Rebellion, the Jews were banned from Jerusalem, and Gentiles formally controlled the city, which remained so for almost two thousand years. As long as it was the case, the "time of the Gentiles" was not fulfilled. So, what does this time of the Gentiles mean? It means "the season of the Gentiles" in Greek. In other words, as long as the Gentiles occupy Jerusalem, we're not at the End. If we're not at the End, then we're not the End Time generation (Israel leafing out like a fig tree reviving, Matthew 24:32-34), and it isn't time for Jesus to return. When that time ends, it implies the time of the Jews is at hand, indicated by a revived nation of Israel (May 14, 1948) and Jerusalem coming back under Jewish rule (June 1967).

What? You mean, both of those things have happened already? You bet! That means, by Jesus' very lips, that the time of the Gentiles is *ending*, and the time of the Jews is *nearing*.

Do you now understand the prophecy *split* in Luke 21:24? So what will happen during the transition between the time of the Gentiles and the time of the Jews? The End Time “labor pains of Messiah” also called “The Footsteps of the Messiah, The Time of Jacob’s Trouble, and the Tribulation.” The times of the Gentiles are like gestation during pregnancy. The upheaval as the world transitions from the time of the Gentiles and the Jewish Messiah’s kingdom on earth is like labor. Jesus’ return is like delivery when the child is revealed. This might help, too:

- Jesus goes (c. A.D. 30)
- Jerusalem is destroyed (A.D. 70)
- Time of the Gentiles (A.D. 70/135 to 1948)
- Nation of Israel Restored (1948)
- Jerusalem Restored (1967)
- Terrible Transition (?)
- Jesus’ return and the start of Israel’s Messianic Kingdom (?)

Luke 21:25-26 describes the Terrible Time, Luke 21:27 describes Jesus’ return, and Luke 21:28 wraps it up with, “But when these things begin to take place, stand up and lift your heads, because your redemption is near.” In other words, watch because the prophetic signs and markers will be obvious and help us understand the times and the seasons of God’s plan. The first significant marker is Israel restored as a nation (21:29-31). That lets us know God’s prophetic clock is ticking, His plan is in motion, and the time of His geopolitical kingdom on earth is nearing. The generation that sees these signs is the generation that will see Jesus’ return. I believe we’re approaching that event and need to stay hard at work for Jesus’ kingdom, which is what Jesus tells His disciple, who will see the near and far events line up. Don’t get distracted (21:34-5), and stay focused and alert (21:36).

Chapter 22 opens with a gripping revelation. Satan himself enters Judas and moves him to betray Jesus (22:3). You could say the Jewish leaders made a deal with the Devil to betray Jesus.

Jesus has His disciples make arrangements for the Passover meal, which confirms this takes place from Thursday afternoon to sundown. Jesus’ comment, “I have fervently desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer,” is fascinating because He knows it marks the end of His earthly ministry and begins His final horrendous 24 hours. I also see it as God has kept a secret for nearly 1,470 years, and He’s bursting at the seams to

reveal it. Jesus is about to reveal the full meaning behind the Passover events and celebration.

During the first Passover in Egypt, God had a man (Moses), a plan (deliver His people from Egypt), and the means (by the Passover Lamb's blood). At Jesus' Last Passover, He reveals His Father's man (Jesus), His Father's plan (to provide a way to save people from the kingdom of darkness and death), and the means (Jesus' sacrificial death and atoning blood). God kept that revelation to Himself for so long, and now Jesus finally reveals the "secret" to His disciples. God not only planned this 1,470 years earlier, but this was His plan since Genesis 3:15 "He (Jesus) will strike your (Satan's) head, and you will strike his heel." Satan will wound Jesus, but Jesus will bring Satan's destruction. This plan is wrapped up in Passover's pictures which Jesus reveals.

Jesus says this is the last Passover He will eat with His disciples until the Messianic kingdom begins (22:18). He says this when He passes the cup of wine that opens the Passover celebration. Next, Jesus takes a piece of Unleavened Bread (that symbolizes Moses and the Messiah to come) and by saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me," Jesus "show and tells" them that He is the sinless "Moses"/Messiah whose body will be broken as a sacrifice for their sin (22:19). Next, Jesus takes the cup of wine that represents the Passover Lamb's blood and says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (22:20). In other words, "This symbolizes Me. My blood will seal the New Covenant so it is open to all who will come to the Father through it." How will the events of Jesus' death be put into motion? By one of the Twelve (Judas) at the dinner who will betray Jesus (22:22).

Sadly, the disciples begin to dispute who the betrayer could be among themselves, which morphs into the "Who is the greatest" debate, likely from "I would never betray our Rabbi, and I'm one of His most loyal disciples, and therefore, I'll probably get a high position in His kingdom." It's sad that such an immature argument would break out at the heart of Jesus' self-sacrifice. What a juxtaposition, eh? Jesus tells them that such arguments over greatness are the world's way, not His Father's. The antidote to pride and "lording over others" is humility and service. That's how we were designed to live in Genesis 1. We rule the earth, but we're to work shoulder to shoulder with each other, serving and not bossing around, jockeying for position. However, Jesus does have good news. They will become Israel's twelve rulers in the Messianic kingdom.

And yet, Jesus tells the "future judges of Israel" they will be sifted by Satan by witnessing the horrific crucifixion events and having their messianic preconceptions destroyed. Jesus says they all be so shaken they'll abandon Him for fear and self-preservation (22:32). But

Peter, of course, says he won't. Imagine how crushed Peter was when his words came back to rip through his mind and emotions over the next 48 hours. We'll see Jesus help Peter heal when we reach the end of John's Gospel.

Next, Jesus tells them to prepare for trouble. When they had gone out on their previous mission (Luke 9), they were to depend on God alone. Jesus emphasizes that they'll need personal provisions and protection shortly (22:34-38). And with that, Jesus and the D-team leave for Gethsemane to pray (and, for the disciples, sleep). Jesus goes off about a stone's throw away to pray. I find it reassuring that our perfect Savior needed and accepted an angel's help, not to avoid the coming trouble but to help Jesus through it. How much more does God send angels to help us in our time of trial? Jesus is under such intense stress that He begins to burst blood vessels in His face. When mixed with His sweat, it looks like rivulets of blood streaming from His head. A foreshadowing of the thorny crown (22:44)?

Judas arrives on cue and identifies Jesus (22:48). One of the disciples jumps in to defend Jesus and cuts off an ear that Jesus promptly heals. Now is not the time for self-defense procedures. Ignoring the disciples, the mob seizes Jesus and takes Him to His trial before the Sanhedrin, at least some of them, along with the High Priest Caiaphas (22:54). Peter denies Jesus. The guards beat and abuse Jesus. The day is starting to dawn, so it's about 5 am. Then comes the final questioning. I refer you to my commentary on this section in Matthew. In short, the court asks Jesus if He's the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus affirms that and also tells them He's the Son of Man, the divine-human who will be His Father's agent for judgment at the End Times. That seals Jesus' fate.

In chapter 23, the Jewish leaders bring Jesus to Pilate and accuse Him of being a Messiah-wannabe. Luke points out their charges; "misleading our nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king" (23:2). The leaders are painting Jesus as a full-blown insurrectionist that could threaten the peace and incite a rebellion against Rome. Those are trumped-up charges because Jesus did none of that. And while Jesus did say He was Israel's messiah, He did nothing to show He was trying to set up an earthly kingdom to oppose Rome. Pilate doesn't buy the leaders' charges. "Are you the king of the Jews?" (23:3) Pilate asks somewhat skeptically as I see it and dismisses the Sanhedrins' claims.

But the leaders persist by telling Pilate that Jesus' influence goes far beyond Jerusalem. It reaches Galilee, where Jesus started His mission, and if Jesus incites His followers, the whole country could explode. "Galilee, you say? Herod wants to meet this Jesus and is in Jerusalem for Passover." So Pilate sends Jesus to Herod. However, Jesus refuses to

perform a miracle on command and refuses even to answer King Herod Antipas. The disappointed king sends Jesus back to Pilate, and the two corrupt leaders become friends from that point on.

Back with Pilate, we have the “Jesus or Barabbas” choice. Pilate still isn’t buying the Sanhedrin’s accusation, and neither has Herod. Therefore, Pilate will beat Jesus as an example and let Him go (23:14-16). But mob rule starts, and the whipped-up crowd cries out for Barabbas’ release and for Jesus to be executed. Pilate, likely fearful of an actual riot starting, figures one miserable Jew’s death is better than a whole city of hundreds of thousands of Jews storming the Roman fortress. He turns Jesus over for execution.

On the way to the crucifixion site, the Roman soldiers press a Jewish pilgrim from Cyrene to help Jesus carry His cross beam (23:26). As the procession winds its way to Golgotha, many are crying that their candidate for Messiah is going to die. What a swing in emotions from just four days earlier. “King David’s all-powerful heir is here! Deliverance from the Romans is at hand!” Now they watch as a broken and bruised Jesus is led to the humiliating and torturous execution that was so well known.

Jesus utters a curious statement, “For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (23:31). It means, “If the Romans do this to an innocent person, what’s are they going to do to Jerusalem and its inhabitants when it’s time for God’s judgment?”

Jesus is crucified between two thieves. According to Luke, one thief verbally abuses Jesus cynically, while the other thief makes an astounding statement of faith! Despite the understanding that Israel’s Messiah will have a physical kingdom on earth and Israel’s Messiah will die, the thief asks Jesus, “remember me when you come into your kingdom” (23:42). The thief believes Jesus is the Messiah and that somehow, Jesus will come through this. Then the thief will be resurrected as Messiah’s kingdom begins as God’s word says. However, Jesus (God’s Living word) tells the thief, “Don’t worry. I’ll see you shortly in Paradise” (23:43)

Jesus dies, and the massive Temple curtain (the *parochet*) is torn *down* the middle showing that no human was involved in it. God tears apart what stands in the way of us coming to Him (the separation caused by sin).

Luke again shows his perspective through those he highlights at Jesus’ death – a Roman centurion who acknowledges the truth of Jesus’ righteousness and the women who followed Jesus. Luke honors those disregarded and dismissed by recording their responses and faithfulness.

Joseph of Arimathea, “a good and righteous man, a member of the Sanhedrin, who had not agreed with their plan and action,” steps up to see to Jesus’ burial. Since it was Preparation Day and the Sabbath would start in a few hours (meaning Jesus died on Friday), they placed Jesus’ unprepared body in a newly cut-out tomb (23:53-54).

Chapter 24 begins on Sunday morning, the first day of the week. The women go to the tomb to prepare Jesus’ body for burial, and He’s gone! Two angels meet them and remind the group that Jesus told them He wouldn’t be dead on the third day. The women run to tell the disciples who refuse to believe their nonsense. But Peter runs to the tomb to check out their story (24:12).

In our closing chapter, Luke includes three episodes that the other writers don’t. The road to Emmaus account has two of Jesus’ disciples (one was Cleopas, vs. 18) discussing and arguing about what the women had reported – Jesus’ missing body. Jesus suddenly comes up to the two, but they are somehow prevented from recognizing Him. The following interchange always makes me laugh when I read it.

Jesus: “Hey, guys. What’s happening? What are you arguing about?”

Cleopas: “Seriously? Did you just blow into town, or are you the only one in Jerusalem who doesn’t know what’s been going on over the last three days?”

Jesus: “No,” Jesus says as He rubs His hands, looks at His feet, and scratches His side. “Do tell.”

The two disciples give Jesus the Cliff Notes version. They tell Jesus that many Jews in Jerusalem thought this Jesus guy would be Israel’s Messiah, but the Romans killed Him, and Jesus has been dead for three days. However, some women said they went to the tomb but didn’t see His body, only a couple of angels who said Jesus was alive and walking around. As the women had said, some other disciples went to the tomb and found it empty.

Jesus uses this as a teaching moment. As the three walked along, Jesus explained that the Law and the Prophets spoke of Jesus, His death, and resurrection (24:27). Now, think of what that means, dear reader. You should be able to read through the Hebrew scriptures and find prophecies and pictures revealing God’s plan of salvation through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Even more, there’s enough Good News about Jesus and what He’s done to bring anyone to faith in Him. How much more so with the Hebrew scriptures, the Gospels, and the rest of the New Covenant scriptures?

Upon their arrival at Emmaus, Jesus fakes like He's going on, and in good Jewish fashion, they offer food and lodging to the stranger who led them on their profound Bible study. When Jesus broke the bread, they suddenly recognized Him ("Whenever you do this, remember Me"), and Jesus vanishes. The two from Emmaus jump up and run to the disciples to tell them they've seen Jesus, which is no small feat assuming they had to cover about 5 miles to reach the place where the inner circle had gathered. Once there, the rest of the disciples relay that Peter has already encountered the risen Jesus.

Suddenly Jesus pops into the room. Because they think they see a ghost, Jesus has to calm them and prove He's real by showing them His wounds, proof of His crucifixion. For further evidence (and because He's famished after not eating since Thursday evening), Jesus asks for a bit of dinner. As with the two from Emmaus, Jesus opens the other disciples' minds to understand the scriptures so they can understand what has transpired and why. 1) Messiah had to die and then rise three days later. 2) "Repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem." But the guys won't have to rely on themselves to do the job. Jesus can now send the Holy Spirit; they must all wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit comes to empower them for their mission. With that, Jesus blesses His crew and ascends to heaven to begin His High Priestly intercession (Hebrews 7:25) for His community of believers – Jews and, soon, Gentiles.

INSIGHT

Luke closes his Gospel with a significant observation. Jesus leads His team outside Jerusalem to the vicinity of Bethany, on the summit of the Mount of Olives. This event happens on the fortieth-day post-resurrection (Acts 1:3). Jesus lifts His hands and blesses them. The "Lifting of the Hands" is shorthand for the Aaronic Blessing, the High Priestly blessing of Numbers 6 that only Israel's High Priest may give.

"May the Lord bless you and protect you; may the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; may the Lord look with favor on you and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24-26).

Why does Luke note this? To prove that the eternal Jesus is now Israel's High Priest and there will never be another. And with that, Jesus leaves His disciples in a particular way that we'll discover in Acts 1, which has a very powerful significance.

November 2 : Scriptures John 1-3

SUMMARY

Welcome to John's Gospel! John's Gospel differs from the Synoptic Gospels in about 90% of his material. John focuses less on the "miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts" (Study Bible). Instead, John focuses on Jesus' identity and teachings and how we disciples should live accordingly. Most scholars agree that John wrote his Gospel around 70 A.D., about forty years after Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection and sometime around the Roman army's destruction of Jerusalem. John's other writings included 1, 2, 3 John and the book of Revelation.

John is a fascinating writer who uses techniques we should remember as we read. First, John's Gospel is organized mainly around the Feasts of the Lord, specifically, Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. If you understand how those feasts came to be, the events and celebrations involved, and the key themes, a lot of John's material explodes with meaning. I'll try to point to those things as we cruise by them. John even uses a "minor" feast, Hanukkah (the Feast of Dedication), as the backdrop of some highly significant revelations about Jesus.

John also likes to use imagery to highlight his point, and it's almost like he winks at us as he writes. For example, light is used for spiritual insight, knowledge, God's revelation, goodness, and high points. He uses darkness for spiritual dullness, ignorance, lack of God's revelation, evil, and low points. This imagery helps explain why John says, "And it was night" in John 13:30.

The "Jews." We often see this in John's Gospel, and the phrase has frequently been used to set Christianity apart from Judaism and, sadly, to promote antisemitism (Jew hatred). Let me be clear. *John is Jewish. Jesus is Jewish. The disciples were all Jewish. The Early Church was entirely Jewish.* Gradually Gentiles joined the new messianic stream of Judaism nicknamed The Way. Over the first three centuries, The Way became overwhelmingly Gentile as Judaism rejected the "heretical" sect of Judaism that followed a dead messiah wannabe despite claims that Jesus rose from the dead and God's evidence of ongoing signs, miracles, and wonders.

As the newly-forming "church" grew, the incoming Gentiles also brought antisemitism to varying degrees. The "family fight" between believing and non-believing Jews escalated into animosity between a Jewish Judaism and a Gentilized form of Judaism called Christianity. To the Church's shame, there was far more hurt perpetrated against the Jews by Christians than vice versa. Thankfully, in our day, great strides have been

made in Jewish-Christian relations as both sides have faced brutal truths and accepted their respective culpability in almost 2,000 years of pain. However, I believe the Church has inflicted the bulk of that pain through persecutions, the Crusades, pogroms, and the ultimate horror of the Holocaust. May God grant the two sides of His family – Israel descended from Abraham and Christians as Abraham’s descendants through faith in Jesus – greater love and understanding for each other.

So, what does John mean by “the Jews?” In most cases (determined by context), he refers to the Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus. Period. He writes as a Jew in a new Jewish spiritual renewal movement called the New Covenant against the entrenched Jewish establishment that opposes The Way. That’s it.

John’s purpose is to evangelize people through what he shares (John 20:30-31). He often emphasizes Jesus’ deity and preexistence and then brings Jesus’ divinity into human life. Also, John clearly states that “eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ (17:3). Further knowledge of God comes from believing and knowing Jesus. ‘Knowing’ and ‘believing’ are key terms for John. Both occur over 90 times in this Gospel and are always used as verbs. Jesus’ teaching in John reminds us that knowing God and believing Jesus are expressed in action” (Study Bible). I couldn’t have said it better than that.

There is much more in John’s Gospel to study, but this is *Cruisin’ Through the Bible*, and I don’t want to get bogged down on the side of the road. Let’s get started.

“In the beginning...” (1:1). Sound familiar? That’s right. John starts with the exact words as Genesis 1:1. Why? Because he’s presenting a new creation through Jesus the Messiah and invoking the beginning of God’s revelation to the world. The first part of Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God...”. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John tells us more about God “in the beginning.” He uses two trains of thought simultaneously. In Jewish thinking, God’s word performs God’s will. For example, God wants things to exist, so He “speaks” them into being (read Genesis 1). In Greek thinking, “Word” is “Logos,” the idea that there is an agent between God and the material world that does God’s work on His behalf. Why? Because the spiritual realm is morally good, and the physical world is morally wrong and evil. Surely God could *never* touch the material world. Therefore, He “created” a go-between to do His work on the material world for Him. John welds the two ideas together.

On the Jewish side, John reveals Jesus IS God’s word. Jesus’ mission is to do His Father’s will on earth, and the Father’s will is to save humanity from sin that He must eventually judge and destroy. The Father doesn’t want anyone to be destroyed, and he wants

everyone to be saved. Therefore, the incorporeal (without a body) Father sent His Son to perform His will. On the Greek side, the Father is spirit. Therefore, God figured out a way to enter and become a part of His physical creation without contaminating Himself with the sin and evil in the world. Jesus is the divine person who becomes human and stays sinless, so He can take on sin at the cross, nullify it, and offer an exchange to anyone who wants to believe in Him and be granted eternal life as it was meant to be “in the beginning.”

Jewish thought – the Word does God’s will, and Greek thought – the Word does God’s will in place of God Himself. John artfully, wisely, and beautifully weaves these two trains of thinking together. Jesus is the Word, sent to do His Father’s will in the flesh to open the door to eternal life and a return to the Eden design.

John uses the “Word” idea to describe Jesus in simple and profound ways. Jesus is eternal and has always existed, He is God, and Jesus is distinct from the Father and the Spirit within the Godhead (1:1). Yes, we’re talking about what the Church theologians have named the Trinity. The term “Trinity” doesn’t exist in the Bible, but the idea’s truth is clearly revealed, such as at Jesus’ baptism and how Jesus speaks of His Father and the Holy Spirit as part of the Godhead with Him, yet separate from Him. For more study about this, see gotquestions.org/Jesus-Word-God.html and gotquestions.org/the-Word-was-in-the-beginning.html.

Jesus is eternal and was present when the physical universe was created (1:2). He is the source of life, and the life of God was revealed through Him. John calls God’s revelation “light,” and though opposed, it has never dimmed nor succumbed (1:4-5).

John the Disciple describes John the Baptist as “a man sent from by God.” This verse makes me smile because John sets his readers up. Just as God sent a man to prepare the way for God’s revelation in human form, so God sends another man, Jesus, to *be* God’s revelation in human form. If God sent one man, He could undoubtedly send another, which He did. John separates himself from Jesus as the one who testifies about the “light,” but isn’t the “light.” Jesus is the approaching “light” (1:6-9).

Because the world is lost in sin, it is in darkness, totally blind to any revelation about God. All people cannot see God or anything that reveals Him, such as creation (Romans 1:20). And even if they look at God’s light, they willfully turn a blind eye to it (Romans 1:21). So, when Jesus arrived in the world He created, the people didn’t recognize Him for who He was and for that reason, didn’t accept Him (1:10-11). However, some did recognize

Him, and by receiving Him, they were redeemed (restored to God's family as His children, 1:12-13).

"The Word became flesh and dwelled among us" (1:14). This is the Greek idea of Logos, an intermediary that's less than God but acting on God's behalf. However, John has already told us that the intermediary is not a created being but God Himself. John corrects the part the Greeks don't understand, but the Jews do. And in the same verse, John is profound in a few words. The Greek word for "dwelled" is *skenoo*, meaning "to pitch a tent." In other words, through Jesus, God set up a tent and camped with His people in the wilderness called earth. A Jewish mind would read this and immediately think of Israel's wilderness wandering where God lived in a tent (the Tabernacle) just like His people did for forty years. During that time, God fed His people, gave them water, protected them, healed them, fended off enemies, and taught them His way to live – *the same thing Jesus did during His ministry!* Also, the idea of God tenting with His people is one of the themes of the Autumn Feast of Tabernacles. See? John is invoking references to the Feasts of the Lord even from the beginning.

As we read, we finally understand why John says Jesus is greater than him in the other Gospels. It's because Jesus is God and has existed before John was a spark in his father, Zechariah's, eye (1:15). Moses gave the Israelites God's commands, and Jesus graciously showed them what they meant and how to live them (1:16-17). Finally, Jesus is the only intermediary between God and humanity. Jesus shows us what God is like by putting Him in a form we can understand and relate to (1:18). Whew! How's that for a bucket full of theology?

When the "Jews from Jerusalem," i.e., the representatives from the Sanhedrin, come to John the Baptist and ask him if he's the messiah, John says he isn't. Even though he is the prophet Malachi's "Elijah" who comes to prepare Messiah's way and introduce Him to Israel, John is not the real Elijah as the leaders infer. Nor is John the "Prophet" that Moses said God would send to guide and teach His people (Deuteronomy 18:18).

By the way, when Moses said that to the Israelites, he included a scary statement about the Prophet whom God will send. "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him," and "I (God saying this) will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name" (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19). Because of this promise, the Jews were looking for a prophet who would be like Moses, almost as if the Prophet were cut from the same pattern – lawgiver, deliverer,

manna delivery service, provider of water, defender of God's people and defeater of evil personified (Pharaoh) through the blood of the Passover Lamb. *This idea is crucial to keep in mind as you go through John. It will play a big role. You'll hear the Jewish people reference "the Prophet."*

So, John is not Elijah nor the Prophet. But he *is* the "Elijah" who will introduce the Messiah, and Jesus shows up (1:29-34). He calls Jesus "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Knowing what you know about John the Disciple and how he uses the Feasts of the Lord to shape his material, the reference to the Lamb of God will speak to people about Passover. For those in the know, it also speaks of the *Tamid* (Daily) sacrifice that opens and closes the Temple's daily sacrificial service. Jesus embodies *all* of the Temple sacrifices and what they mean. He takes away sin and atones for guilt. Jesus is our reason to thank God, He makes peace between God and us, and through Him, our Heavenly Father provides all we need. I've just summarized the five categories of Temple sacrifices, and Jesus represents them all there.

There were two men near John the Baptist when he said that, and they turned to follow Jesus. One of those two was Andrew, who found his brother, Simon, and brought him to Jesus. Little did Peter know what was coming when Jesus nick-named him "Rock" (Peter, *Petros*, rock). Then Jesus calls Philip, who, in turn, tells Nathanael about Jesus being "the one Moses wrote about in the law [and so did the prophets]" (1:45). See? The Prophet that Israel *must* listen to because God will call them to account for not doing so. The other prophets also revealed God's plan to bring a ruler for Israel of David's family line. But Nathanael's not convinced because Jesus is from the backwater village, Nazareth. However, when Jesus "reads Nathanael's book" as a prophet would, Nate is soundly persuaded, "You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!" (1:49). Jesus' cryptic saying about being the ladder means He is how heaven and humanity finally reconnect (1:51).

Okay, here's another thing about John. He records Jesus' signs and statements that highlight His messianic nature. Some of those are about water, and those water incidents underscore essential things about Jesus, linking Him to Moses as the Prophet who is to come.

Water played a big part in Moses' ministry. The beginning of Moses's life included water (floating on the Nile), and from that moment, Moses entered the world to become Israel's God-given leader eventually. With God's will and power, Moses could manipulate water (the Nile to blood, crossing the Red Sea, changing contaminated water to drinkable water, and water from a rock twice). Also, water that doesn't move is "dead" water, and water

that moves is “living” water. Dead water is contaminated (stagnant) and makes things ritually impure. Living water (like a river or rain) is pure. It washes away ritual impurity, heals people, and is a well-known picture of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2 opens with the first sign – the water-to-wine incident at a wedding in Cana. In brief, weddings are joyous times made even more joyful with wine for obvious reasons. According to customs, the host provides the good wine first, then the lesser quality wine after drunk people can't tell or care about the wine's quality in their cups. If the wine runs out, it's a great humiliation for the host, implying a lack of planning or, worse, not being a person of means to provide enough wine for such a momentous occasion.

And the humiliating thing happens – the wine runs out. Jesus' mother, Miriam (Mary), knows Jesus can do something about it. We aren't told how she knows this; anything about her knowledge is pure speculation. Jesus says it isn't the right time to reveal who He is, but He agrees to help. Why are there jars of water? For purification. These six *huge* jars hold about 20-30 gallons of water for purification – washing hands and feet, utensils, etc. Jesus miraculously (and quietly) turns the water into wine.

On the surface, this is a miracle. But John makes a statement with this first account. Water is well-known as a way to purify a person. But water can't remove sin and its consequences. Only blood can atone for sin (Hebrews 9:22 Leviticus 17:11). Blood is also a sign of a covenant (Exodus 24:8), setting someone apart for God's service (Exodus 29:21), and it was the Passover lamb's blood that protected people from death, leading to their freedom from bondage to Egypt. All of this plays into John's first water sign picture. Jesus' blood will bring cleansing, set people apart, save them from sin and death, and seal the start of the New Covenant. Changing the water of purification to Jesus' blood for purification and cleansing is John's way of pointing to the shift from the Older Mosaic Covenant to the New Covenant. Also, each sign reveals an aspect of Jesus' messianic nature and mission.

Moving on from Cana, Jesus goes to Capernaum as His base of Galilee ministry operations.

Remember what I said about John orienting his Gospel around the Feasts of the Lord? He does that right here in 2:13-25. This event happens during the Passover when all Jewish men pilgrimage to Jerusalem to participate in the Feast. Therefore, the events and themes of Passover will color John's recollection. In this case, cleansing the Temple is a purification event, a need to reform what the Jewish faith had become. Remember, this is a Jew referring to what he sees about his own faith practices. Jesus' new way of God's

kingdom will replace the older way. Jesus' body (His sacrifice) will replace the Temple's sacrifice for sin and cleansing.

Here in the last half of chapter 2, we see John's pattern begin. Jesus will do something, then follow it up with an explanation. First, Jesus clears out the Temple (3:13-17). Second, Jesus explains that His body is the new Temple (2:21). He won't destroy and rebuild the Temple in three days. Jesus is talking about His body, and although His disciples don't get what He's talking about either, they'll remember His words after His resurrection.

As Jesus ministers in Jerusalem during this first of three Passovers, many people believe in Him as Israel's potential Messiah, a king like David, and perhaps a leader like Moses (which would be in the forefront of their minds because it *is* Passover). But Jesus has His agenda and refuses to entrust Himself to people because He knows they'll try to make Him their king and thus short-circuit His Father's plan (2:23-25).

Chapter 3 is about a Sanhedrin member, Nicodemus, coming to Jesus to check out His credentials as a rabbi and possibly find out if Jesus is a possible candidate for Messiah. A teaching follows the account of Nicodemus' visit, and a question about purification between Jesus and John the Baptist's followers also leads to another teaching. There's John's pattern again.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night (3:1). On the surface, this indicates Nicodemus doesn't want to draw attention and make it look like the Jewish leaders were checking out Jesus. However, John's mention of it being "at night" also implies spiritual ignorance. Nicodemus is an official rabbi, well-versed in the Tanak (Law, Prophets, Writings – the Hebrew scriptures), and yet, he's clueless about Jesus. The "light who came into the world" is about to shed some light on the nature of how people will be saved under the New Covenant, something about which Nicodemus should know because it comes from the book of Jeremiah.

While Nicodemus recognizes Jesus' status as a God-anointed and sent man of God, Jesus cuts to the chase. "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (3:3). Nicodemus misses Jesus' point about entering God's kingdom. Under the Older Covenant, becoming part of God's kingdom was a matter of natural birth into the nation of Israel and proving one's trust and relationship with God through faithfully living according to God's commands. But the new way into God's kingdom that Jesus reveals is through the work of the Holy Spirit, aka the New Covenant.

The Older Covenant is by the flesh, and the results are flesh, meaning an unchanged human nature. The New Covenant is by the Spirit, resulting in a changed human nature. If a Gentile wants to convert, they must go through circumcision and water immersion as signs they have changed their ways to live God's way. As a baby is born through water and blood, so a Gentile is "born again" as a Jew through blood (circumcision) and water (baptism). Jesus reveals that His new way of entering God's kingdom is to be born again through His blood (atoning for sin) and the Holy Spirit's (the Living Water's) work of cleansing and purifying.

What's this "wind blows where it pleases" analogy? Just as no one knows where the wind comes from, its effect on things can still be seen. The Spirit acts in the same way on people. We know the Spirit is from God, but we can't tell when and where He'll work, but we see His effect on people as His power transforms them into God's obedient children.

Here's another curious reference. What does Jesus mean when He says to Nicodemus, "No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven — the Son of Man." It sure sounds like a reference to Proverbs 30:4, "Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his hands? Who has bound up the waters in a cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is the name of his son—if you know?" The "His name" is Yehovah and His son's name is Yeshua/Jesus. Jesus is dropping a *massive* clue about His origin and nature by referencing a single verse. If Nicodemus gets it, Jesus tells him that He is God's son, the divine/human Son of Man. This idea is one that a Jewish teacher should understand because their understanding of the Son of Man is that this being is the only human being who exists in the spiritual realm and a divine being who will enter the physical realm.

After Jesus alludes to His nature, He alludes to His work. When the Israelites sinned, God sent snakes to kill them (Numbers 21:4-9). When Moses lifted the snake on a pole in the wilderness so that crowds of afflicted people could see it, God gave His word that all who looked at it would be healed from the snake's venom and saved from death. The people were saved and healed through their faith in God's word. This is Jesus' point. Jesus will become the snake (identifying with sinful people and bearing punishment for our sins), He will be lifted on a pole (the cross), and all who trust the Father's word that Jesus' sacrifice for them will be saved from death and healed.

Why has God chosen to do this? Because He loves His children and doesn't want to see them die. What loving, sane parent wants their child to die? If that causes deep pain to a human parent, imagine what it does to our God when He loses multitudes of children because they reject His simple offer. "For God did not send his Son into the world to

condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (3:17). Jesus didn't come to condemn the world. Every person is born on death row awaiting execution. Jesus came to unlock the prison doors and issue a pardon to anyone who wants it on God's terms and His terms alone. Sadly, some reject God's offer as a person in darkness can't stand light (3:19-20). But others will embrace the revelation of God's salvation!

The end of chapter three finds Jesus and His disciples immersing people in the Jordan River near where Jesus was baptized, and John is still doing so with his disciples. An argument starts between John's disciples and a Jewish leader from Jerusalem about purification, which brings up the reality that people are "deserting" John the Baptist and following Jesus. John is clear. His mission as Messiah's herald is done. The people are leaving him and going to Jesus because that's the way heaven (a euphemism for God) wants it (3:27). The people don't belong to him any more than a bride belongs to the best man. As the bride belongs to the bridegroom, the people belong to their Messiah and God (3:28-30). Once the wedding is underway, the best man steps back and lets the spotlight shine on the happy couple.

Jesus is greater than John because He comes from heaven, and while Jesus speaks of God and His new way, people have trouble accepting His new revelation. But those who do affirm God and His word are true. How so? Because the one (Jesus) who speaks gives the Holy Spirit without measure (3:34), meaning it's by the Holy Spirit that we understand Jesus, His work, and our Father's plan. The Father has invested His plan into His Son's hands to carry out with all obedience. Therefore, eternal life centers on Jesus alone. Those who receive Jesus have eternal life. Those who reject Jesus remain under their spiritual death sentence (3:36, 18).

INSIGHT

"The one who believes in the Son has eternal life" (3:36). Did you catch that? The statement about having eternal life is in the *present tense*. That means from the moment you receive God's offer of salvation; *you begin living your eternal life*. Even though physical death interrupts our physical life, there is no interruption of our spiritual life and our never-ending relationship and communion with God and His presence. After death, we're just waiting for our bodies to catch up with our everlasting life already in progress.

November 3 : Scriptures John 4-5

SUMMARY

Chapter 4 opens with Jesus leaving the baptismal site where John was baptizing people. Jesus leaves the area because the Pharisees have been visiting John the Baptist and questioning his ministry credentials. As we've already seen in the other three Gospels, the Pharisees will do the same for Jesus throughout His ministry. However, now is not the time for Jesus to confront the Sanhedrin's representatives, although He's already spoken with a genuine seeker, Nicodemus.

As Jesus makes His way back to Galilee, He takes the shorter route through Samaria even though it is customary for strict Jews to avoid the area due to concern over ritual defilement and the animosity between Jews and Samaritans. John tells us Jesus rested at Jacob's well near the town of Sychar. The well was near territory that His ancestor, Jacob, had given to his son, Joseph, and was located to the east of Mount Gerizim and Ebal, where Israel affirmed their covenant with God once they entered the land (Joshua 8:30-35).

Understandably, Jesus was worn out, hot and tired from His long walk despite it being the shorter route. It seems this event takes place in the late spring, not long after Passover, or early summer, after Shavuot/Pentecost. Either way, the weather in Israel gets scorching and dry during the summer months, and it was about noon when Jesus arrived at the well. He must have been walking ahead of His disciples since Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman was private, and the disciples caught up to Him only after the woman left.

What starts as a simple request turns into a deep theological conversation that ends with Jesus explicitly telling a Samaritan woman (that's two strikes against her) that He is Israel's Messiah. Jesus asks for a drink, and she's amazed that a Jewish man would even talk to a woman and a Samaritan at that (4:9). Jesus teases the woman with a hint that there's more to the situation than she thinks. He offers her "living water." The woman takes that literally and wonders how Jesus can do that without a bucket to draw from the well. But Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit, which will be given to not just Jews but Gentiles under the New Covenant. To give her living water, Jesus must be able to dig another spring-fed well, not just a cistern that catches well water or one into which groundwater seeps. If so, then Jesus must be greater than "our father Jacob... He gave us the well and drank from it himself as did his sons and livestock."

The woman launches into the Jewish-Samaritan debate that had been going on for centuries. The Jews denied the Samaritans any right to the God of Israel because of their half-breed, Jewish/Gentile status, and their skewed form of Yehovah worship. The Jews believed the only legitimate place and way to worship was at the Temple in Jerusalem. The Samaritans claimed an older location, Jacob's land, and Mount Gerizim, where Moses told the Israelites to worship Yehovah (Deuteronomy 27:4-6). By calling on "our fathers," the woman also laid claim to Abraham and Jacob, who built altars in the area (Genesis 12:7, 33:20). Yes, it's a debate on who is doing things more accurately than whom.

Jesus doesn't get caught up in the debate and continues to guide her toward the most profound revelation of her life. The important point isn't about physical water but spiritual matters (4:14). Still thinking of water, the woman's interest is piqued. Why? Because schlepping a jug to a well and back home is tiresome. Living water? Running water? Great! Sign her up. And the Living Water (the Holy Spirit) starts to flow.

Jesus tells her to get her husband to help her (4:16). Upon her response that she has no husband, Jesus tells her something He wouldn't know naturally, that the man she's with is not her husband. She's a woman who has been divorced five times, and she's given up on marriage by just living with a man. That makes her an even worse person in Jewish eyes – a Samaritan woman living with a man out of wedlock. Nice. And yet, this doesn't turn Jesus away from her. He presses in because He has something special for her.

Because of His supernatural knowledge, Jesus becomes more than just a Jewish man. He's a Jewish prophet. That plays into the Samaritan-Jewish debate that a prophet, Yehovah's representative, can surely resolve. "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem," so who's right (4:20)? Jesus answers 1) Worship really isn't about locations or confined to buildings. Focusing on the natural at the expense of God, who is spirit, is a form of idolatry. The time is coming when that will be a moot point. 2) However, we Jews know more about the God we both seek than you Samaritans. 3) But a time *is coming* (meaning it's already in process) when worship will be through the Holy Spirit and according to God's truth.

Why does the woman jump to "I know that the Messiah is coming...When he comes, he will explain everything to us" (4:25)? Because Jesus' answer about the Samaritans worshipping what they don't know doesn't satisfy her. Therefore, she falls back on God's final authority – the Messiah. Jesus drops the bomb – I am the Messiah and God's absolute authority. At that revelation, the woman leaves her water jar and runs to tell her people that Israel's Messiah has shown up. Why does she believe Jesus' claim to be the Messiah? Because Jesus backed it up with a prophetic revelation (4:39).

Meanwhile, Jesus' disciples catch up with Him and are amazed that He was talking with a woman. Here's an insight from my Study Bible. "The disciples' amazement that Jesus was talking with a woman stemmed from the common Jewish teaching that talking too much to a woman, even one's wife, was a waste of time, diverting one's attention from the study of scripture and reflection on God." As they press Jesus to have lunch, He tells them what truly sustains Him is doing His Father's will and work (4:34). What is that work? It's about bringing people into His Father's kingdom.

When Jesus asks, "Don't you say, 'There are still four more months, and then comes the harvest?'" that places this event in the third month of the Hebrew calendar, roughly late May to early June. What's the significance of that? Because that's when the wheat harvest finishes and the Feast of Shavuot celebration occurs. If you recall, there's a book of the Bible called Ruth. It's about a non-Israelite woman from a people whose origins are rather yucky. Ruth was a Moabite. The Moabites and Ammonites came from Lot, Abraham's nephew, who escaped Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction. Fearing that there were no men with which to start families after the fiery event, Lot's two daughters decided to get their father drunk and have sex with him to have families for humanity's sake (Genesis 19:30-37). Those incestuous unions created the Moabites (Moab, "of my father") and the Ammonites (Ben-Ammi, "son of my people"). Ruth's story reaches its high point during the wheat harvest, the same time of year as the Samaritan woman story we're reading. Although Ruth was from a despised people, a righteous man of Judah, Boaz, graciously offered to marry her, making her a part of God's people because of her faith and commitment to Israel's God. Because Ruth was a Gentile adopted into God's family through her faith, the Feast of Shavuot foreshadows a time when all the world's nations will come to Israel's God through faith. Do you see the connection?

The Samaritan woman is of a despised people. And yet, because she believed a man from Judah who called Himself the Messiah, the door to salvation began to creak open for the half-Jewish, half-Gentile Samaritans. It opens fully a few short years later, right after the Holy Spirit is poured out (the Living Water Jesus offered the woman) and the Gospel reaches Samaria (Acts 1:8, 8:4-8).

Jesus tells His disciples that God's spiritual harvest is already upon them. Even the Gentiles are ready to hear about the way into God's kingdom, perhaps even more so than the Jews at the time. Amazingly, the Samaritans ask the Jewish Messiah and His disciples to stay with them for two days, and they recognize that Jesus is who He said He was.

Jesus returns to Galilee and is warmly received “because they had seen everything he did in Jerusalem during the festival. For they also had gone to the festival” (4:45), i.e., cleansing the Temple (2:13-17) and the signs Jesus had performed (2:24).

Chapter 4 ends with what John labels as Jesus’ second sign, healing the official’s son. In light of 4:44, there seems to have been resistance to Jesus in Galilee. Jesus’ rebuke to His fellow Jews for wanting signs before they believe (4:48) is a sharp contrast to what Jesus had experienced not many days back in Samaria.

Chapter 5 is classic John. We start with Jesus’ third sign, followed by a discourse about the relationship between Jesus and His Father, life and judgment, and testimony about the validity of what Jesus says about Himself.

This event takes place at an unnamed Feast of the Lord. Because John weaves in a particular Feast’s themes, I think this happened during the Feast of Tabernacles because it has water as one of its central themes, and the person is healed via water. Remember, living water equates with the Holy Spirit, who deploys God’s healing power.

Jesus’ third sign, a water miracle, is remarkable because it happened to a man who had been sick for 38 years. According to the tradition that John notes, healing occurred when the water in the pool moved, but only to the first person who made it down into the water (5:7). This pool was not a God-ordained or designed thing, and this pool had been built as a tribute to the pagan god that healed people. Therefore, when Jesus healed the man, it was a direct slam against the pagan god as a testimony to the validity of Jesus’ claims.

Here’s something even more exciting. The man couldn’t get to the living/moving water to be healed, so the Living Water/Holy Spirit came to Him through Jesus (5:9). Jesus simply commanded Him to “get up, pick up his mat and walk.” But the sign creates a scene and a debate that echoes the other Gospel writers’ accounts of what can and cannot be done on the Sabbath, which opens up the discussion. The Jews (Jewish leaders, likely Sadducees or Pharisees, or scribes) saw the healed man doing what they had determined was not lawful on the Sabbath because they had classified carrying objects over certain distances as “work” (5:10). The man says he was told to do it, so he did.

Does anyone else find it odd that the leaders are more concerned about the man breaking the Sabbath than rejoicing that his 38 years of infirmity had been miraculously ended? So the leaders go off to find out who did this. Why? Because the Torah says if a prophet or dreamer performs a sign and yet tells people to abandon God, they are to be dealt with harshly (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). God said He would allow false prophets to test Israel to

see if they would remain faithful to Him (Deuteronomy 13:3-4). Therefore, since someone pulled off such a great sign as healing a 38-year invalid, the leaders want to know if that man is a legitimate prophet or a test from God. They likely have their suspicions because the one who healed the man had told him to “break the Law” (in their eyes). Now they must check the healer out... if they can find him.

Meanwhile, Jesus finds the man, and the man identifies his healer to the leaders. Because Jesus broke the leaders’ misapplied Sabbath laws, they began persecuting Jesus (5:16). Since the discussion is about “working on the Sabbath,” Jesus says His Father, God, was still working on the Sabbath. That *really* ticked the leaders off because not only was Jesus breaking their laws, He equated Himself with God (5:18), which was absolute blasphemy and worthy of death.

Jesus tells them He’s only doing what He sees His Father doing (5:19), meaning He was in complete harmony with His Father’s will. His Father’s will is to do good on the Sabbath, and Jesus should know because, as God, He gave Moses the Sabbath law. Jesus also reveals that they’ll see more excellent signs, even giving life to the dead. But as God’s Son, Jesus can not only give life, but He has His Father’s authority to judge when the time comes (5:22). Therefore, Jesus warns them to be careful about rejecting Him because “Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him” (5:23).

In 5:24, John takes us back to Jesus as the Word who gives life to people (1:4). Jesus has His Father’s authority to grant life to people and judge them. As *God’s divine Son/Life-giver*, Jesus can do what His Father can do – raise people from the dead – which will happen when the *Son of God/Judge* comes to judge people regarding whether they align with God or not. Jesus is qualified to be the Father’s perfect judge because He makes His judgments perfectly align with His Father’s will (5:30).

As to whether Jesus speaks the truth about Himself, He moves to the question of validity. The Torah says, “A fact must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses,” especially in capital punishment cases (Deuteronomy 19:15). So, are there more witnesses to Jesus’ claims than just His own testimony? Yes, John the Baptist testified about Jesus (5:31-35). Furthermore, Jesus’ works, the Father, and the scriptures testify about Jesus (5:36-38). As to the scriptures, even though the leaders hold God’s word in high regard, they refuse to accept God’s word about God’s Word (5:39-40).

One reason the leaders don’t accept Jesus and do not give Him glory is that they don’t love God. If they truly loved God, God’s love (Jesus, 3:16) would be revealed to them. But the leaders desire glory from one another than from God. And speaking of the scriptures,

Jesus appeals to Moses as one of those who testify about Him “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me” (5:46). The irony is that the leaders look to Moses as the one who promised them hope in God. Yet, they refuse the Hope from God, who now stands before them. Jesus’ reference to Moses is crucial because John 6 reveals Jesus as the Prophet like Moses, whom Moses promised God would send and to whose words they would be held to account.

INSIGHT

“For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me” (5:46). This verse has been the cornerstone of my ongoing Torah class. We should be able to find Jesus all over the first five books of the Bible because Moses wrote them. At the most basic level, we see Jesus in:

Genesis – Everything, the entire physical universe, the spiritual realm, and all else we may not know was created by Jesus (Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:16-17). We are recreated and reborn through Him into God’s everlasting family (Genesis 48:5; Ephesians 1:5).

Exodus – Jesus is our Passover Lamb, who frees us from the bondage of sin (Exodus 12:13; John 1:29; Luke 22:20) and the presence of God on earth who leads us to our encounter with the Heavenly Father so we can enter His kingdom and live there forever (John 14:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:12).

Leviticus – Jesus is our Great High Priest who makes atonement for us and intercedes for us continually (Leviticus 16:30; Hebrews 2:17, 7:25).

Numbers – Jesus is with us as we travel through the wilderness of life, providing everything we need to make it to our Promised Land successfully, God’s eternal presence (Numbers 9:15-23; Matthew 1:23, 28:20).

Deuteronomy – Jesus is our lawgiver, who teaches us how to live God’s way, and our “prophet like Moses who is to come” (Deuteronomy 32:46; Matthew 5:17-19).

November 4 : Scriptures John 6-7

SUMMARY

Chapter 5 is probably linked to the Feast of Tabernacles because of its moving/living water healing theme. Chapter 6 opens about six months later. How do we know that? Because 6:4 tells us, "Now the Passover, a Jewish festival, was near." The Feast of Tabernacles occurs in the middle of the biblical 7th month of the moon-based calendar (September-October). Passover occurs in the 1st month, six months later (March-April). And because John's chapter 6 account occurs at Passover, we should see themes and pictures embedded in what he writes that are associated with the people and events of the Exodus. So, put on your super-duper Jewish Feast decoder glasses, and let's cruise through today's reading.

From the start, a picture hits us head-on. A huge crowd follows a miracle worker who heals the sick, goes up a mountain, and sits to teach people (6:1-3). So, am I talking about Moses or Jesus? Both. Now you see John's technique. He presents Jesus as the new Moses ("a prophet like me from among your own brothers," Deuteronomy 18:15). Why is the link important to John? Because the rest of Moses' sentence is, "*You must listen to him.*" Moses acted and taught. This pattern is what John follows again in this chapter. Jesus does something, and then He teaches about what He just did to make His point.

So, here's the scene, and it's a familiar one – Jesus' fourth sign, the feeding of the 5,000. As Jesus teaches, He notices a vast crowd coming to Him. He turns to Peter and asks, "Hmmm. I wonder where we can possibly get enough bread to feed all these hungry mouths?" I love this because Jesus doesn't ask this on the spur of the moment. He already has a plan, and he draws His disciples into it by having them think *they* have to supply food for the multitude. When God asks you a question, there's a reason for it. It's a leading question that's designed to lead you to what He wants you to think about or do. Pause before you respond because the Lord often reveals something to you, which usually involves a new perspective, thinking outside of your box, or a challenge to stretch yourself in some way. Here, Jesus is about to expand His disciples' understanding of who He is.

While Jesus sees the situation with eyes on His Father, Peter sees the situation with eyes on the problem. They just don't have enough money to give every person even a bite of bread (6:8). Great! Jesus has His disciples right where He wants them. You know the drill from the other Gospels. Jesus multiplies bread and fish until everyone is stuffed and still has some left over.

But now comes John's contribution to the Gospel accounts. Remember, this happens as Passover nears. So, what are the people thinking about? *The Exodus with Moses as the leader*. What did Moses promise the Israelites at the end of their wilderness journey? God would send them a (singular) Prophet like Moses. Therefore, the Jews of Jesus' day expected a person who would do the things Moses did. What did Moses do in the wilderness to satisfy the massive crowd's hunger in the early days of their wilderness journey? Moses, as God's representative, "provided" a bread-like substance, manna, for the almost 1.5 million Israelites to eat. And not just once, mind you, but continuously, daily, for forty years!

Fast forward almost 1,500 years, and again the people see a man miraculously provide bread for a multitude to consume. Given their Passover mindset, what would you expect the people to conclude? Right! "When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, 'This truly is the Prophet who is to come into the world'" (6:14). Jesus did this sign on purpose, and the people understood what Jesus meant by it. *Jesus is the Prophet Moses told them God would send. Therefore, they should listen to Him!*

But a little problem pops up, "Therefore, when Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself" (6:15). Can you blame the crowd? Who wouldn't want a king who will feed you for free forever? And if Jesus is like Moses, rather than an exodus from oppression as the ancient Israelites experienced, Jesus could exit the Roman oppressors from Israel! Food and freedom. What's not to like about that? But that wasn't the Father's plan, and Jesus knew it, so He escaped to a lonely place on the mountain to prevent being forced into Israel's kingship ahead of time.

As evening comes on and after the crowd disperses, Jesus' disciples climb into a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. The Galilee is a large body of water set in a bowl-shaped landscape. The winds can whip the water into large waves when storms come up, and I've experienced this on huge lakes while fishing in Minnesota. My scariest time on a boat was on Leech Lake, where the winds pushed up four-foot waves that crashed into the bow of the fishing boat. Had we inadvertently turned sideways, we would have been swamped! All the motor could do was slowly drive us through the waves to safety. Terrifying, frigid, and wet – some fishing trip. Insult to injury, we didn't catch a thing other than a bad attitude. So yes, the picture of the disciples in a vicious storm on the Galilee is particularly vivid.

But along comes Jesus, taking a midnight stroll *on the water!* Of course, the disciples were afraid. People can't walk on water, but spirits can, I guess. Jesus reassures them, gets in

the boat, and suddenly the boat reaches the shore. Why did John include this sign? Because Jesus is the Prophet like Moses. Didn't Moses face an uncrossable body of water at night whipped up by a strong wind? Didn't Moses, by God's help, suspend the physical laws of water that caused the Red Sea to split, providing an escape path through the water? Didn't Moses bring the Israelites to the other side safely? Jesus did the same, only He one-upped Moses. He walked *on* the water, not *through* the water on dry land. Jesus, as the prophesied Prophet, foreshadows a coming Exodus from a dark and evil kingdom greater than the Exodus Moses led.

Now comes the teaching section after the two events. The once-fed, now-hungry crowd of Messiah-wanters see that Jesus and His "cabinet" have left. So, logically, they go off to look for their Divine Meal Ticket, err, I mean, their cherished rabbi. Of course, they find Jesus in Capernaum.

Crowd (shuffling their feet): "So... Rabbi. When did you get here?"

Jesus: "Just stop right there. I know what you want. More food. But there's something greater than bread that you need."

And so, Jesus launches into His lesson on the one thing they really need to sustain life, and that's working for the food the Son of Man will give them (6:27). Jesus' words here are loaded with meaning. "Son of Man" recalls Judgment Day, when God's agent, Jesus, comes with the Father's approval to separate the righteous from the wicked and reward the righteous with eternal life in God's kingdom. However, the crowd doesn't understand the depth of what Jesus said. Crowd: "Right! Work for food. Got it. What work do we need to do?" Jesus tells them the only thing they need to do is trust Jesus and believe Him. Crowd: "Believe you're from God and the Son of Man. Got it. So what sign are you going to do to convince us? Maybe You could... let's say... create some more bread for us? (*wink*) After all, our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, just as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

Do you see how insidious and manipulative this is? They're offering a trade to Jesus. We'll believe You only if you'll give us some bread." Their suggestion sounds so much like Satan's temptation. "Sure, You're the Father's Son. Since You are, then prove it. Create bread (from stones or a few loaves of bread). And like one of Satan's temptations, they back up their offer with misquoted scripture, "it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat" (6:31; Exodus 16:4; Psalm 78:24). Jesus corrects them, "Moses didn't give you manna. God did. And God's offering you bread again." Ah-hah! Now they're getting somewhere. Jesus is saying God wants to give them bread to sustain their lives. Great!

But they're mistaken. The crowd thinks of physical bread, while Jesus uses bread as an analogy for Himself (6:32-33), so they come out and ask for bread (6:34).

Therefore, Jesus explains the analogy. The bread He's talking about is Himself. Lesson time, O reader. When there's a comparison in the Bible, Hebraic minds think about function, not form. So, when Jesus says He's bread, the thing the Hebrew mind goes to (or should) is, "How does bread function?" Bread is a daily necessity, and it sustains life. Therefore, Jesus is a daily necessity, and He "feeds"/sustains our lives, which means more than just physical lives. Physical bread sustains physical life. Jesus, the "bread" His Father gives people, supports them now and into eternity. Jesus' struggle is that He's dealing with people thinking *too low*. Their minds are focused on the physical reality but not the spiritual reality. Jesus' words here are similar to why He used parables. Those who understand Jesus' parables prove that the Father has called them. The same is true at that moment (6:36-37).

Jesus has come to give people eternal life and sustain it (6:35). Those who understand His teaching, showing that they see and believe, belong to Jesus, and He'll never turn them away or lose them because that's His Father's will. The goal of the Father's will is for Jesus to restore those He has given His Son to eternal life on the "last day," Judgment Day, when the Son of Man arrives (6:40). However, the crowd doesn't see and believe yet (6:36).

The crowd may not entirely understand what Jesus says, but they know that He just claimed a divine origin (6:41-42), and since their heads are grounded in this world, they immediately object. "How can You say that You've come down from heaven? We know Your parents."

And now we have Passover/Exodus and Jesus' day thoroughly woven together. The Israelites in the wilderness often grumbled against Moses and God because their eyes were too worldly-focused, and they lacked faith/trust in God and His representative. At this point, the Jews started grumbling about the "Prophet like unto Moses," just like their ancestors did. And just like the ancient Israelites grumbled about the manna from heaven (Numbers 11:4-6), so the people are grumbling about their "Moses" and "manna/bread from heaven," Jesus (6:43).

Their grumbling proves that the Father has not drawn them to Jesus yet because they don't have the faith to believe Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. "Citing Isaiah 54:13, Jesus affirmed that while His ministry fulfilled the prophetic vision that one day all people

would be taught by God, this applied only to those who were drawn by the Father and who came to believe in Jesus as Messiah" (Study Bible).

Jesus continues with His bread from heaven/manna in the wilderness analogy to press the crowd into taking a stand for or against Him. He's about to drop a bomb on them.

When Jesus says, "anyone who believes has eternal life" (6:47), He also implies, "anyone who doesn't believe doesn't have eternal life." As life depends on physical nourishment, so eternal life depends on spiritual nourishment. Jesus, like the manna in the wilderness, provides for life (6:48), except manna didn't save the ancient Israelites from dying (separation from this world). But Jesus can save a person from death (separation from God, 6:50).

And now the bomb drops, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. *The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh*" (6:51). Crowd: "Say what, Jesus? Do you mean You want us to eat your body? Are we talking cannibalism here?"

Without God's help, the human mind can't understand spiritual truths, "But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually" (1 Corinthians 2:14). God often uses human illustrations to depict spiritual truths to help us understand what He's trying to get across to us. However, without His help, we can get stuck on the physical illustration and miss the truth or go off the rails completely.

God strictly forbids cannibalism, and being forced to resort to eating human meat is an extreme sign of God's worst judgment (Leviticus 26:29; Deuteronomy 28:53). Jesus purposefully veils the truth He's teaching so that those whom the Father isn't calling are repelled, but those who are being drawn to the Father will understand.

6:53-58 is Jesus' point of His teaching. On the surface, the unbelieving crowd thinks Jesus is telling them to eat His body and drink His blood. Yuck! But what Jesus is really saying is He's the only way to find and sustain eternal life. "The Hebrew idiom 'flesh and blood' refers to the total person" (Study Bible). In other words, those who want eternal life must believe and embrace Jesus, His words, and His atoning work entirely and without reservation. The person who does so will be resurrected from the dead on the Day of the Lord and will live forever in God's kingdom.

But the crowd gets stuck on the cannibalism thing, *even those who were counted among Jesus' disciples*. They can't leap from literally taking Jesus' words to figuratively. Because of that, they turn away from Jesus (6:60, 66).

Jesus purposefully taught profound spiritual truth in a way that was intended to "cull the herd." Just as persecution proves who is committed to following Jesus no matter what (even upon pain or death), how we understand and obey God's word does the same.

What's fascinating is that the Catholic Church has fallen into the same thinking. Catholicism teaches that the bread and wine turn into Jesus' body and blood literally, and they base their belief on this section of scripture. But as you've seen, Jesus was speaking figuratively. Jesus used the bread (representing the Jews' anticipated Messiah who would deliver them from slavery) and the wine (representing the blood of the Passover Lamb that saved the Israelites from death) and used the meanings to explain why He was about to die on a cross. He is God's Deliverer and will stop death from ending us forever by dying for us.

So, many pastors and church leaders water down the high demands Jesus places on His followers. Following Jesus means sacrificing one's life for Him, figuratively, not literally, but the intensity of the expectation is the same. It means placing God's will first in my life, obeying God's word at all times, and when faced with the choice between Jesus and anything else, always choosing Jesus.

Sadly, becoming a Christian today in the Western world is primarily mental assent with no life change. For most, it's mouthing a prayer with no discipleship. Truth be told, joining a country club, or a sports team is often more difficult than joining a Christian congregation. At least with a sports team, people participate in the game, and with a country club, people give more than a few dollars for the cause.

But then again, why would an army want self-focused, uncommitted, and unwilling soldiers? Basic training is purposefully hard to toughen up those who are committed and wash out those who aren't. We don't need to add anything to God's word to strengthen Jesus' community or wash out the pretenders. Jesus' community needs to raise the bar to His standard rather than drop it on the ground to meet the world's standard.

Isn't it fascinating that Jesus lost a lot of followers at this time? His purpose wasn't to gather crowds and accomplish His Father's work, which needed only a cross and some disciples. Jesus turns to His inner circle of twelve and asks if they also want to leave. "Nope," replies Peter. "Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We

have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (6:68-69). By faith in God's word, Peter proved His faith in God's Word, Jesus.

In chapter 7, we again come to another Feast, Tabernacles, so six months have passed (7:2). His siblings know their firstborn brother does miracles and could be the Messiah, so they press Jesus to go to Jerusalem and announce Himself, backed up, no doubt, with miracles to solidify His credentials. But as we've seen, Jesus is totally committed to His Father's will, which includes the timing and method of doing His Father's work. Jesus defers but goes up to the Feast incognito later (7:10).

Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, the city is abuzz with this amazing rabbi from Galilee. Will He come for the Feast? Is Jesus a good man or a deceiver (7:12)? And yet, no one is speaking openly for fear of "the Jews," the leaders, who aren't so keen on this disturber of the peace.

About halfway through the Feast, Jesus reveals Himself by teaching in the Temple, and the people, especially the leaders, are amazed at the scope of Jesus' learning. "Then the Jews were amazed and said, 'How is this man so learned, since he hasn't been trained?'" (7:15). I'll tell ya. He wrote the Book. It's tough to beat God in Bible Quiz.

In short, Jesus tells the leaders that His authority is from God, and anyone who is set to follow God's will can figure that out (7:16-17). The implication is that Jesus' teaching aligns perfectly with His Father's will. Jesus isn't a false prophet or teacher because He seeks to glorify His Father, the One who sent Him, not Himself, as the false folks do. That sounds like a dig at the leaders, doesn't it? What proves their falseness is the leaders pride themselves on having Moses' law, but they don't keep it. For example, Moses said, "Don't murder," yet the leaders are trying to find a way to "eliminate" Jesus. Why? Because Jesus healed on the Sabbath and equated Himself with God (5:18). Jesus shows that they are just as guilty as Him because *they* work on the Sabbath when they circumcise an infant boy. That requires a "wounding" while Jesus performed a healing. Jesus uses a typically rabbinic argument form called "from the lesser to the greater." "If it's okay for you to work on the Sabbath by wounding because the Law calls for it, how much more for Me to work on the Sabbath by healing which fulfills My Father's intent for the Sabbath to benefit people?" (7:23). The leaders were judging by the Torah's letter rather than the Torah's intent and principles.

The next question is whether Jesus is the Messiah. The three big issues are 1) place of appearance (7:27), 2) signs (7:31), and 3) city of origin (7:42).

Some rabbis taught that Messiah would not be known until the time arrived for Israel's redemption, i.e., God's kingdom to begin. The people know where Jesus is from, Nazareth. So that casts doubt on Jesus' qualifications. But Jesus answers that they really don't know where He's from as He's from heaven and the Father sent Him (7:29). Therefore, Jesus says He meets qualification #1. But since Jesus didn't qualify on this point, the authorities didn't arrest Jesus.

On the other hand, everyone was amazed at Jesus' signs. Since Messiah would be a Prophet like Moses, it stands to reason that Messiah would perform miracles as Moses did. You see this mindset in the crowds wanting to make Jesus King Messiah after feeding the multitude (6:15). Jesus performed so many miracles He obviously qualified on issue #2. Therefore, the authorities sought to arrest Him to prevent an uprising (7:32). Jesus says He will only be with them for a short time. While this stumps His hearers, we know it's because Jesus wasn't going to set up David's kingdom in Jerusalem but to establish His Father's kingdom in people's hearts through His death and resurrection.

Finally, while the people argue whether Jesus is the Prophet or the Messiah, issue #3 comes to the forefront – Messiah's city of origin. The people know Jesus grew up in Nazareth, so they assume that's Jesus' birth city. But the fact is Jesus was born in Bethlehem, David's city. Therefore, Jesus qualifies on #3. A Messianic trifecta!

Amid all this questioning and speculation, Jesus those who have been sent to arrest Him, "I am only with you for a short time. Then I'm going to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come" (7:33-34). What does Jesus mean by this? For those who know the Gospels, Jesus is talking about His death, foreshadowing His crucifixion. But for those at the time, Jesus tells them that they are not going to be able to follow Him leads to speculation about Jesus going to the Jews in the Diaspora (Jewish communities outside of Judea) and teaching them and proselytizing Gentiles to Judaism.

After that, the action shifts to a specific day that follows the week-long Feast of Tabernacles, the "last and greatest day of the Feast" (7:37). The Feast of Tabernacles reminds the Jews of Yehovah's deliverance from Egypt and how He camped with them in the Wilderness for 40 years, providing for their every need. The Feast also celebrates God's goodness at the end of the agricultural year when all the summer and autumn crop tithes are given to the Lord with great thanksgiving, like Thanksgiving Day in the United States. Except this Thanksgiving celebration lasts a week!

Per the Torah (Leviticus 23:36), the Israelites are to hold a solemn celebration on the day following Tabernacles week. This 8th day is called Hoshianah Rabah, or “the Great Save Us!” and is known as “the last and greatest day of the feast.” On this day, the High Priest performs a ritual called The House of the Water Pouring. The ritual is a prayer to God to send the rains, which, in Israel, are supposed to start in October and continue until they taper off in May. If God doesn’t send the rain, the people of Israel will starve. Therefore, “Save us, O Lord, by sending the rains!”

During the ritual's climax, Levites walk around the Altar waving willow branches that create the sound and feeling of wind. Suddenly they stop, and everything grows quiet. The High Priest pours a pitcher of water into one of the corner horns of the Bronze Altar as his assistant pours a pitcher of wine into another horn on the same side. As the two do that, another priest plays the flute. The Hebrew word for flute is *chalil*, which comes from the word *chalal*, “to be pierced or to wound.”

What’s the significance? Rain is moving water, i.e., Living Water, a central theme of Tabernacles. The Hebrew word for “wind” is *ruach*, also used for “spirit.” In Genesis 1:2, we see God’s Spirit hovering over the waters of creation. As rain and wind are linked in nature, the idea of Living Water and the Holy Spirit are connected in scripture. The Bible also tells us that the primary manifestation of God’s kingdom is the arrival of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28). Therefore, the Feast of Tabernacles looks back to when Israel’s King lived with them in the wilderness (providing water from a rock) and looks forward to when God’s kingdom will be restored under God’s Messiah (when water erupts from the Temple and flows to the Dead Sea, Ezekiel 47:1-12). As you can guess, the Feast of Tabernacles has strong messianic themes (water, light, Spirit, God’s kingdom) and anticipates Messiah’s arrival just as Passover does.

During the Feast of Tabernacles, many verses about water gain significance, such as Isaiah 55:1, “Come, *everyone who is thirsty, come to the water*; and you without silver, come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without silver and without cost!” and Isaiah 12:3 “You will joyfully *draw water from the springs of salvation*.”

It was on this day, and most likely during the House of the Water Pouring ritual, when Jesus raised His voice at just the right moment to make a stunning declaration. As the water and wine poured out on the Altar as a prayer for Living Water, the “One To Be Pierced” sounded His voice and declared, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him” (7:37). What was Jesus telling His people? John saw it and made the connection for us, “He said this about the Spirit. Those who believed in

Jesus were going to receive the Spirit, for the Spirit had not yet been given[g] because Jesus had not yet been glorified" (7:39). To John, Jesus' greatest glory was His willing death for us.

- 1) Jesus is the Messiah who will begin God's kingdom on earth.
- 2) The sign of God's kingdom arriving is the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, likened to water.
- 3) God's Spirit will be freely given to all who enter His kingdom (Isaiah 55:11).
- 4) The Holy Spirit's flow (activity) in and through people depends on Jesus completing His self-sacrifice on the cross. John sees the connection when blood and water come out of Jesus' body when His side is pierced by the Roman soldier (John 19:34).
- 5) It's only through Jesus that the Holy Spirit comes to God's people, but He *must* finish His work first. After that, "You will joyfully draw water (the Spirit) from the springs of salvation (Heb. *Yeshua*)."

Amazing, right? This stunning declaration fuels the rampant speculation about Jesus as a possible Messiah. And yet, the people remained divided.

The chapter ends with the Sanhedrin questioning why the Temple cops didn't bring Jesus in. They recognized the authoritative and unique nature of Jesus' teachings, making them unsure whether Jesus was doing anything wrong. The Pharisees' response is telling. They regard themselves as the proper judges of orthodox teaching and practice, and they've already decided about Jesus and His threat to them. They indeed were the false shepherds of Israel (Jeremiah 23; Ezekiel 34) and the Vineyard Tenants (Matthew 21) who were using the "sheep" and the "vineyard" for themselves. Also, the Pharisees' haughty response about the crowds implies they think of them as ignorant and undiscerning, "But this crowd, which doesn't know the law, is accursed" (7:49). Wow, the arrogance. "If it doesn't come out of our chimney, it ain't smoke!"

However, a dissenting voice, Nicodemus, likely representing a silent minority, gives a little jab about "knowing the law." "Hey, you guys who know the law. Do you remember that our law doesn't allow prejudging someone?" But the Pharisees have already decided about Jesus based on their faulty understanding of His town of origin, Nazareth, which we discussed above.

INSIGHT

The people are confused about Jesus' identity in chapter 6. Who is He, and from where did He come? In chapter 6, Jesus calls Himself the bread from heaven, and Jesus' manna analogy about Himself dumbfounds the people. Manna means "What is it?" in Hebrew

(Exodus 16:15, 31). So, like the physical bread from heaven, the people could figure out the spiritual “bread from heaven.”

November 5 : Scriptures John 8-9

SUMMARY

As we leave chapter 7 and enter chapter 8, you may realize a note about or parentheses around 7:53–8:11. That's because some of the earliest manuscripts of John's Gospel don't have that section. That tells Bible translators the section was likely added later to John's Gospel. Does that make it any less inspired or part of the Bible? Not to me because what happens in the account of the Forgiven Adulteress conforms to the rest of the scriptures beautifully and fits into the themes of the current narrative, the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2-9:21). However, the "insertion" does interrupt the flow of thought from 7:52 to 8:12, and we'll connect the two shortly.

So, Jesus has come up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, as all observant Jewish men should do if they're able. During His first few days, Jesus butted heads with the leadership over proper Sabbath observance, and the leaders and people wrestled over Jesus' messianic identity. Jesus revealed that as Messiah, He would send forth the Holy Spirit when it was time, and Jesus avoided arrest because of His exceptional teaching. However, the leadership has grown to despise Jesus and sees Him threatening their "turf."

As chapter 8 opens, Jesus is teaching in the Temple complex. Right in the middle of His class, the scribes and Pharisees drag a woman before Jesus and ask for a ruling. The woman had been caught in adultery, and according to the Torah, she must be stoned. Their request is a trap similar to the Roman coin question (Luke 20:24). If Jesus rules that she must be stoned to uphold the Torah, then the leaders had evidence to accuse Jesus before the Romans since they were in charge of executions. The Jewish leaders could only execute people with the Governor's permission. If Jesus ruled that she shouldn't be executed out of deference to the Romans, the leaders had evidence that Jesus was violating the Torah and could dismiss Him as a candidate for Messiah, or they could seek Jesus' execution as a false prophet (Deuteronomy 13:1-5).

Jesus doesn't answer them and scribbles in the dust on the Temple complex tiles. Upon being pressed again to make a ruling, Jesus says, "The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her" (8:7) and scribbles again. As the leaders get Jesus' point, they walk away. Why? Because Jesus taught the leaders a lesson without saying a word.

First, by touching the dust, Jesus reminds them of the test for suspected adultery in Numbers 5:11-31. As part of the test, a woman drinks water with dust from the

Tabernacle floor sprinkled. If she's guilty, her reproductive organs will become useless. If not, then nothing happens, and her husband must realize she's innocent and stop accusing her.

Second, by touching the dirt, Jesus causes them to think about Jeremiah 17, which speaks about those who are faithful to God and those who aren't (spiritual adultery). Jeremiah's words are Jesus' ruling:

"The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it? I, the Lord, examine the mind, I test the heart to give to each according to his way, according to what his actions deserve... A glorious throne on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. Lord, the hope of Israel, all who abandon you will be put to shame. All who turn away from me will be written in the dirt, for they have abandoned the Lord, the fountain of living water."

The leaders came to trap Jesus, but Jesus tested them for their faithfulness to God. The episode took place in the Temple complex, the "sanctuary." And knowing their hearts, Jesus (God) declares that the leaders are guilty of far greater adultery than the woman because they've "abandoned the Lord, the fountain of living water" (a Tabernacles theme). When the leaders understood Jesus' ruling about their spiritual adultery, they left in disgrace. Without accusers and witnesses, the woman could now go free. Yet, Jesus doesn't gloss over her sin. He refuses to condemn her but tells her not to sin again (8:11).

So now we come to 8:12. How do we connect 7:52 to 8:12? Because 7:52 leaves off with the Pharisees saying, "Investigate and you will see that no prophet arises from Galilee." But God prophesied through Isaiah that Galilee of the Gentiles would see *a great light* (Isaiah 9:1-2) and *that light would be a child* who would govern Israel, be called, "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6), and would sit on David's throne (Isaiah 9:7). How does John's account pick up from 7:52? "Jesus spoke to them again: 'I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life.'" Bam! Isaiah 9 connects the two portions because Jesus is the light from Galilee and is, therefore, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace who will sit on David's throne.

Furthermore, this discussion took place in the Temple courts where four humungous 70' menorahs stood, each with four bowls of oil. The wicks were the worn-out linen clothing of the priests. They were lit each night throughout the Feast of Tabernacles, and it was said that every courtyard in Jerusalem was illuminated with their light. These four menorahs were called "The Lights of the World."

But the leaders dispute Jesus' claim as the light of life (the revealer of God and His way) because He's the only one testifying about Himself, and it takes two or more witnesses to establish a matter (Deuteronomy 19:15). Not so, Jesus replies. He has more than one witness. As Jesus said, He has two witnesses – Himself and His Father.

He begins to reveal what's going to happen to Him. He's going away, and they can't follow Him. The leaders wonder if Jesus is going to kill Himself. No, but Jesus is going to die – by their hands. And because they reject Him, they will die in their sin (8:23-24). This new teaching reveals that and something else. In Greek, in this section, Jesus says "I am" (*ego eimi*) a lot. Do you remember who also referred to Himself as I AM? Yup, God. With that in mind, look at what Jesus says to them about Himself, hinting that He really is God in the flesh:

(8:12) I AM the light of the world – I AM God's revelation to all people.

(8:18) I AM the One who testifies about Myself – I AM God, and the Father also testifies about Me.

(8:23) I AM from above – I AM God who has come to you from heaven.

(8:24) If you do not believe I AM (God), you will die in your sins.

(8:42) I came from God, and I AM here – Immanuel, God with us.

(8:58) And the big one – I assure you: Before Abraham was, I AM." Yes, Jesus told them directly that *He was God and existed before Abraham did*.

However, Jesus also tells them they won't understand until He's "lifted up," i.e., crucified (8:28).

The remainder of chapter 8 is intense! Jesus and the leaders go nose to nose. Jesus says only those who obey His teachings are His disciples, and those teachings free people (from sin). But the leaders misunderstand and think Jesus is talking about political freedom. Nope. Jesus clarifies that He's talking about sin; because they sin, the Pharisees are slaves to sin. Such slaves don't stay in the house. They're eventually let go. But those who are of the family remain in the house. Only through Jesus can a person stay in God's household. In other words, the Pharisees are in a precarious position.

Regarding their previous claim about being Abraham's descendants (8:33), Jesus agrees with them but says they have another father, revealed by the fact that they're planning to kill Him. They say Abraham is their true father. *Au contraire*, Jesus says. If that were the case, then they would do what Abraham did, and that was to believe what God said to him. The I AM is talking to the Pharisees in the form of Jesus, and they're rejecting God's words.

Since Jesus is talking about them having another father other than Abraham, the leaders shoot back with, "Oh yeah? GOD is our Father!" (8:41). Not true, says Jesus. God isn't their father because 1) they don't love Jesus, and 2) they can't understand what Jesus is saying to them. The devil is their father because they want to murder Jesus and are liars (8:44).

Now the leaders resort to slander and insults to denigrate Jesus. "Speaking of the devil, you have a demon, and you're a Samaritan, right?" Wow! A spiritual and ancestry smear! Jesus honors His Father, and by dishonoring Jesus with insults, they're smearing and dishonoring His Father. Jesus lays it out for them – those who accept His words and follow them will never die but have eternal life.

This claim really sets off the leaders. "You say, 'Those who keep My word will never die.' Really? Abraham and the prophets died. Can you bring them back to life? Are you greater than them, Jesus?" (8:52-53). But Jesus won't brag about what He can do. He'll leave that up to His Father, whom Jesus absolutely obeys (8:55).

Now Jesus goes in to score the goal. "Your father Abraham was overjoyed that he would see my day. He saw it and was happy" (8:56). Jesus speaks of Abraham anticipating the fulfillment of God's promise to him of offspring and the world being blessed through his offspring (Genesis 12:3). That blessing to all people would come through Abraham's descendant, the Messiah. Jesus' statement comes from rabbinic teaching that when Abraham was about to sacrifice His son, Isaac (a clear picture of Jesus being offered up), God stopped Him, and Abraham "saw" the ram snared in a nearby thicket. As the rabbis put it, Abraham not only saw the ram with his physical eyes, He saw the Messiah caught in the sins of his people with his spiritual eyes of faith. That's what Jesus means by, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad" (8:56).

Of course, the leaders take this literally. How could Jesus have been alive for Abraham to see "His day," i.e., in the flesh? And here it comes...

"Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I AM."

I capitalized the I AM because Jesus boldly claimed to be God, and that's precisely how the leaders took it. That was outright blasphemy, and the punishment for such was stoning, but Jesus hid within the Temple crowds.

But this isn't over. Chapter 9 continues the Feast of Tabernacles section begun in chapter 7, and the entire chapter again reveals Jesus as God in the flesh. The Feast of Tabernacles

themes highlighted here are “living water” – the power of the Holy Spirit – and “the light of the world” – who has eyes to see God’s truth and who can’t.

Upon seeing the man born blind, Jesus’ disciples voice a common belief that sin is behind infirmities (9:2). Since the man was born blind, it could have been his parents’ sin that caused his blindness. Jesus immediately puts that speculation to rest. Sin has affected the world, causing distortions and death in everything, but not every problem is caused by sin. However, every issue is an opportunity for God to work (9:3) and receive glory. In this case, the man will become a living testimony to God’s Messiah.

Did you catch that? Jesus says this is an opportunity for His Father to *work*. On what day of the week does this happen? The Sabbath (9:14). Jesus chose this man to heal to “pick a fight” with the leaders about their idea of working on the Sabbath. God’s work must be done while it’s light, i.e., Jesus, the light of the world, and God’s fullest revelation is still with them (9:4). The Pharisees have declared things to be work that God wouldn’t. Doing good involves forms of work, but it isn’t “officially” work since it’s performed to do good. That’s where the leaders missed it.

The man who was blind from birth is a special case. It’s one thing to heal eyes that once functioned. That’s *restorative* work. But it’s another to heal eyes that never worked, and that’s *regenerative* work, a creative miracle *that only God can do*. Jesus spits in the dust to create mud and smears it on the man’s eyes. (Yuck! Just sayin’.) Do you remember John 1, where John uses language that recalls Genesis? How did God form Adam? From the dust of the ground. What is Jesus doing? Using water and dust to create eyes for the man. Then He sends the man to wash his eyes in the Pool of Siloam, a pool of “Living Water.”

“What was the function of the Siloam Pool during Jesus’ time? Because *the pool is fed by waters from the Gihon Spring, located in the Kidron Valley, the naturally flowing spring water would have qualified the pool for use as a mikveh for ritual bathing*. However, it could also have been an important source of fresh water for the inhabitants on that part of the city” (biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/the-siloam-pool-where-jesus-healed-the-blind-man, italics author).

The people are doubtful that the man who can now see was the man who was blind from birth (9:8-9). He assures them he is that man but doesn’t know where his healer, Jesus, is.

Jesus did all sorts of healing signs, but this one stands out and makes John’s list of Seven Signs that prove Jesus is the Messiah:

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- 1) Changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana (2:1-11)
 - 2) Healing the royal official's son (4:46-54)
 - 3) Healing the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem (5:1-15)
 - 4) Feeding the 5,000 (6:5-14)
 - 5) Walking on water (6:16-21)
 - 6) Healing the man born blind (9:1-7)
 - 7) Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-45)

Now comes testimony time! The leaders drag the now-seeing man into interrogation and discover that Jesus healed the man and *did it on the Sabbath*. Well, that's it. Jesus can't be the Messiah because He blatantly violated the Torah! Everybody knows the Messiah will be perfectly Torah-observant (as we know Jesus to be since He's the Walking Word of God). When the leaders from the Sanhedrin ask the man what he believes about Jesus, he says Jesus is a prophet (9:17).

However, "the Jews" (the leaders) don't believe the man's testimony, so they call in his parents. They admit their son was born blind, but they refuse to say anything about who and how he was healed for fear of being excommunicated (9:20-23). So they throw their son under the bus, "He's of age; ask him."

The leaders return to the man and demand he tells them the truth according to how they understand it – that Jesus is a sinner, least of all for healing on the Sabbath (9:24). So the man tells them the truth. He doesn't know if Jesus is a sinner, but he knows he was blind and can now see (9:23). They demand to be told again how Jesus did it. And here's a clue from John – "I told you, but you didn't listen." That's the leaders' problem. They refuse to listen and so become blind to the truth, whereas the blind man listened (and obeyed) and can see. Because the leaders are curious to know how Jesus performed His miracle, the man assumes they want to follow Jesus, to do the things He's doing (9:27).

That almost makes the leaders' heads explode. They're disciples of Moses, God's greatest prophet. Why would they stoop to follow this back-water rabbi who teaches wrongly and breaks Moses' law that they incorrectly interpret and apply? But remember, John has already shown Jesus is Moses' God-ordained successor.

And the simple man understands the truth because he's not locked into the leaders' preconceived ideas. It's easy to understand. Jesus did a miracle, only those who fear God and obey His will can do such things, and the miracle was unprecedented. Therefore, Jesus must *really* be a man of God! The leaders' arrogant reaction is similar to their earlier accusation against Jesus – a slanderous smear. "You were born entirely in sin," they

replied, 'and are you trying to teach us?'" When losing an argument, get rid of the pesky evidence (9:34).

The final scene of 9 is beautiful. Jesus looks for the rejected one and reveals Himself as the Son of Man, Israel's Messiah. The man believes and pays Jesus homage. Yes, I know it says he worships Jesus, but the word *proskuneo* can mean simple bowing, prostrating before someone, and worship, which involves paying honor. He now knows Jesus is more than a prophet. He's God's official agent, the Son of Man and Messiah. But God Himself? Jesus is only just beginning to unveil that. The light Jesus revealed in 8:58, "before Abraham was, I AM," will intensify in chapter 10.

But not all will be able to handle the light of God's revelation, "The light was in the world, and the world came into being through the light, but the world didn't recognize the light. The light came to his own people, and his own people didn't welcome him" (1:10-11). "Giving sight to the righteous blind (Psalm 146:8; Isaiah 29:18, 35:5, 42:7, 18) and blinding the unrighteous persons who can see (Isaiah 6:10, 42:19; Jeremiah 5:21) are common OT themes" (Study Bible).

INSIGHT

"This happened so God's works might be displayed in him." Broken lives are opportunities for God to display His work through them and glorify Himself. Does God break lives to do so? No. Life happens in our sin-impacted world and with it comes physical problems (sickness, genetic disorders, deformities), emotional problems, mental illness, and spiritual problems. Not does God reveal and glorify Himself when He touches people to heal them or help them cope with their afflictions, but He's also glorified *when He works through us when we help these afflicted and vulnerable people*. Find someone in need and help them as Jesus' representative. By doing so, you glorify Him and our Heavenly Father!

November 6 : Scriptures John 10-12

SUMMARY

As we move into chapter 10, please don't let the chapter heading break the flow. Start your *Cruisin' Through the Bible* reading with John 9:39 and zoom right into 10:1. It'll make more sense because Jesus compares Himself as God's Ideal/Good Shepherd with the leaders who are the wicked shepherds of Israel and hirelings who care nothing for the sheep except to shear them for profit. Jesus rebukes them for not giving good spiritual care and guidance to God's people, the "sheep of His pasture" (Psalm 79:13).

In 10:1-6, Jesus is the shepherd ("the authorized caretaker of the flock," Study Bible), and the poor leaders, past and present, are the thieves and robbers who have come before Jesus (Jeremiah 23:1-2; Ezekiel 34:1-22). The guard at the gate is the Father, who opens the gate so His Son can gather the flock. What's the key to knowing the true shepherd? The sheep hear, understand, and obey His voice. God's sheep follow Jesus because He is God's voice to His people, and those who know it will respond. It's funny because even though Jesus speaks about them, the leaders "didn't understand what he was saying, and thus, not His sheep.

So, Jesus takes another run at it, but now He calls Himself the Gate, meaning the way to eternal life (10:10). The leader's way steals from the sheep and ultimately kills and destroys the sheep.

Jesus uses the Good Shepherd analogy to reveal more about Himself and His purpose. 1) Jesus lays down His life for the sheep while the hireling leaders abandon them because they don't care about the sheep, only to save themselves. 2) Jesus' sheep instinctively know their Good Shepherd, which is a mark that they belong to Him (10:14). 3) As Jesus will lay His life down for His sheep, there are other sheep, the Gentiles, who will come to Jesus to be part of God's flock (10:16). That said, an interpretation that more accurately relates is God's promise in Ezekiel 34:11-16 where God talks about the northern kingdom Israelites who were scattered by Assyria and never returned to their homeland. One of Messiah's hallmarks will be to regather all of God's people to their ancestral land, making them one flock under one shepherd, God Himself (Ezekiel 34:15).

Jesus again prophesies His coming self-sacrificial death. No one will kill Him. Though done at man's hand, Jesus will fully control what happens from His death to His resurrection (10:17-18). As usual, many of His hearers don't fully comprehend what Jesus reveals. They don't know if He's demon-possessed or a righteous man.

John now shifts a couple of months forward from the 7th month, Tishrei, to the 9th month, Kislev, during which Hanukkah (aka Chanukah, the Feast of Dedication) occurs. What is Hanukkah? “The history of the Feast of Dedication goes back to the intertestamental period and the Maccabean Revolt. After the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes profaned the Jewish temple and forced the Jews to abandon their sacrifices and adopt pagan rituals, a group of Jewish freedom fighters rose up, defied the oppressive pagan regime, and overthrew the Seleucids. The temple in Jerusalem was re-dedicated to God; ever since then, the Feast of Dedication has been celebrated to commemorate this meaningful event in Jewish history” (gotquestions.org/Feast-of-Dedication.html). Hanukkah is not a Torah Feast of the Lord. It was created in 164 B.C. to honor the Jews retaking and rededicating the Temple. The fact that John mentions the rest of chapter 10 takes place during this episode is essential as Jesus alludes to some critical Hanukkah elements.

The first is Jesus walking around the Temple, the focal point of Hanukkah (10:23). “The Jews” (leaders of the Sanhedrin) are frustrated and want Jesus just to come out and say plainly if He’s the Messiah or not. Period. The funny part is Jesus has told and shown them, yet they refuse to believe until they get the answer they want – that He’s not the Messiah. And because they refuse to listen to Him or accept Jesus’ works as proof, that proves they don’t belong to God (10:26-27). However, Jesus has sheep who do belong to God, and His Father has given them to His Good Shepherd to care for them (10:27-28), and no one (the leaders) will be able to take them from Jesus by force. Why? Because Jesus’ Father will prevent it because Jesus and His Father are one. *This statement, “I and the Father are one,” now opens up a massive “Hanukkah problem” for the leaders because Jesus declared He is God.*

Why is that a “Hanukkah problem?” Because the last time someone declared themselves to be a god was Antiochus Epiphanes IV, the villainous Syrian-Greek general who tried to wipe out the Jewish faith in 167-164 B.C., leading to the creation of Hanukkah. Epiphanes means “Manifestation of God.”

The leaders could have thought, “Well, isn’t that just great? Hanukkah came about because of a Gentile who declared himself a god, and now one of our own has gone off the deep end and equated Himself with *the* God” (10:33). But Jesus points out that they’re Hebrew scriptures refer to all sorts of beings as gods – spiritual beings, angels, even human judges (Exodus 21:6). If calling a human a judge a god/*elohim*, how much more does that fit Jesus who is “God’s Son,” meaning Israel’s king (Psalm 2), although Jesus is playing with words. He’s God’s Son – literally and figuratively. But Jesus moves on, “Forget semantics. Trust My works to prove My credentials” (10:37-38). The leaders still refuse and try to arrest Jesus, who escapes from Jerusalem to the east, across the Jordan

River to where John the Baptist immersed Him at the start of His ministry. Ironically, the learned leaders refused Jesus while many of the “great unwashed” came to Jesus and believed. As the voice in the wilderness who prepared the way of the Lord, John had done an excellent job.

According to John, in chapter 11, we come to Jesus' last (7th) and most significant sign apart from His crucifixion and resurrection and the 5th of His 7 “I AM” declarations. The other “I AMs” of John are:

- 1) “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51). As bread sustains physical life, so Christ offers and sustains spiritual life.
- 2) “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). To a world lost in darkness, Christ offers Himself as a guide.
- 3) “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7,9). Jesus protects His followers as shepherds protect their flocks from predators.
- 4) “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14). Jesus is committed to caring and watching over those who are His.
- 5) “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). Death is not the final word for those in Christ.
- 6) “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Jesus is the source of all truth and knowledge about God.
- 7) “I am the true vine” (John 15:1, 5). By attaching ourselves to Christ, we enable His life to flow in and through us. Then we cannot help but bear fruit that will honor the Father. (thomasnelsonbibles.com/blog/jesus-seven-i-am-statements/)

Jesus and His disciples get word from Mary, the woman who anointed Jesus (Luke 7:38), that Jesus' dear friend, Lazarus, is ill. Jesus says the sickness will not end in death and is for God's glory (11:4). But Jesus delays! You'd think He'd scamper off to Bethany to heal Lazarus. Ah, but sometimes God's plans include more than simple healing. Sometimes God wants to display His power *and loving care* to His children.

When Jesus decides to leave for Judea, His disciples warn Him of the danger from the leaders (11:8). This likely happened not long after the December/Hanukkah stoning-for-blasphemy attempt in chapter 10. But John shows us Jesus is in complete control and fears nothing, and He's invincible until it's time to lay down His life. Remember, “This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again” (John 10:17). Jesus' Father has a plan, and while the plan is in motion, Jesus must follow it.

Along the way, Jesus tells the guys that Lazarus has “fallen asleep” and that He will wake His friend up. But as usual, the disciples miss His meaning. So Jesus tells them point blank that Lazarus is dead, not sleeping (11:14). While Jesus knows what’s coming will boost their faith and glorify His Father, the disciples wonder why Jesus would risk His life for a funeral (11:16), including theirs.

What a sad scene. Lazarus has been dead for four days, the mourners have joined the grieving sisters, and all hope is gone. But faith isn’t. Martha knows Jesus could have prevented her brother from dying (11:21) and still trust Jesus despite believing He’s too late to help. Jesus assures her that Lazarus *will rise again*. Martha believes in God’s word. It was commonly believed among most Jews that the dead would rise when the Son of Man appears at the beginning of God’s Messianic Kingdom (Daniel 12:2, 7:13-14). But now she faces God’s Living Word and knows “... that whatever you ask from God, God will give you” (11:22). She’s not talking about resuscitating the recently dead. It’s about physical healing and the eventual resurrection of all the righteous dead.

But Jesus is following a plan. He *IS* His Father’s Son of Man who will resurrect the dead with the power of the Spirit. But think about this. If Jesus can resurrect and restore a long-deteriorated body turned to dust, how much easier is it for Him to raise a dead body that’s only recently started to decay? However, Martha’s not thinking that way. She’s limited to what she knows – Jesus can heal. Since Lazarus died, she has to wait for the resurrection of the dead – and that’s okay with her.

But Jesus is following a plan. Upon hearing of Jesus’ arrival, Mary quickly runs to meet Jesus and falls at His feet in grief, declaring that Lazarus wouldn’t have died had Jesus been there. Despite the plan, it didn’t stop bad things from happening. However, it set the stage for a great thing. *Sometimes the worst has to be endured before the best comes.*

We see Him angry and grieving in one of the most heart-wrenching snapshots of Jesus’ life. As a man, Jesus suffers with His beloved friends. Jesus truly is “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3, ESV). As God, Jesus is angry because of the devastation sin has caused humanity (11:33). The Greek for “angry” means “to snort with anger and be greatly agitated.” Jesus knows what’s coming, but that doesn’t make Him immune from the anger and grief that death causes. To me, the shortest verse in the Bible says the most about Jesus, “Jesus wept” (11:35).

According to the plan, Jesus goes to the tomb and asks for the stone to be rolled away. Martha’s warning about the stench is proof that Lazarus is beyond hope. That’s because it was commonly believed that once a dead body is dead for four days, corruption

(decomposition) sets in. Therefore, Lazarus is not mostly dead. He's all dead (Again, a hat tip to *The Princess Bride* for the adaptation). This understanding is why Jesus waited for two days before leaving. If He had arrived two days earlier, Lazarus' body would still be in the "not decomposing" phase.

And now Jesus sets everything up. He speaks to His Father, and what He is about to do will back up His words "so that they may believe you sent me" (11:42). With that, the Word speaks the word, and Lazarus is raised. Jesus *proves* He is the One who will resurrect the righteous and give all God's children eternal life, just as He said.

You know, raising the dead just doesn't sit well with the Jerusalem leadership. Their refusal to believe and accept Jesus causes them to see resuscitating a thoroughly dead person as a threat rather than a blessing and a cause to rejoice. How perverse! Furthermore, they're more concerned that "the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (11:48). In other words, they're worried about losing their grasp on God's vineyard that they've turned into their personal fiefdom *as if God can't defend what belongs to Him! Faithless wicked shepherds, all!* And so they make their plan. Ironic, isn't it? Jesus brings life, and they plan His death.

Yet even amid their scheming, God shows He controls everything. Caiaphas utters words that he thinks are his but are really from the Holy Spirit. Why is that since Caiaphas and the system were so corrupt? Because God honors what He set up even though the person is fraudulent. More so, God does what He wants. The Holy Spirit caused Caiaphas to prophesy as the anointed High Priest. "You're not considering that *it is to your advantage that one man should die for the people rather than the whole nation perish.*" He did not say this on his own, but being high priest *that year* he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to unite the scattered children of God" (11:50-52). And did you catch John's dig at the corruption? Caiaphas is supposed to be the High Priest for life. Instead, he was the High Priest *that year* because the "right" to be the High Priesthood was purchased from the Romans, not inherited along family lines per God.

Things were becoming so dicey for Jesus that He had to "hide out" until His time had come – the Passover – when the Father would reveal His Messiah and do His great work of salvation, the moment of Jesus' greatest glory, the crucifixion.

Chapter 12 opens six days before the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread, begun by Passover on the first day. If you've been tracking with me, this takes place two days before Jesus' Messianic Reveal Parade (the Triumphal Entry). Mary anoints Jesus' feet

with a costly ointment and wipes them with her hair in a humble and glorifying expression of love and devotion. On the other hand, Judas decries the act not out of concern for the poor but for himself since John reveals his practice of stealing from the group's money bag (12:6). John shows us the Betrayer's character. Why does Judas remain Jesus' disciple? Likely because he figures he'll be part of the Messiah's cabinet, which could be lucrative. Or, he may settle for a little more immediate financial gain.

The news of Lazarus' resuscitation (brought back from the dead) and bodily restoration has reached Jerusalem. Many Jews flock to Bethany to see the miracle worker and His miracle. Therefore, the leaders decide to knock off both Jesus and Lazarus to quell the messianic fervor rising in the city (12:10-11), with many of the inhabitants deserting their control.

But then it happens. Jesus rides into Jerusalem in a grand Messiah parade (12:12-15). The people openly proclaim Him as their Messiah, and Jesus does nothing to stop it because He is the Messiah. Why would He deny the truth? As was typical, the disciples missed the underlying meaning of the events. However, after Jesus is crucified, they'll understand and know what happened and their part in it (12:16). To add fuel to the zeal, those who had witnessed Lazarus' remarkable comeback are testifying about Jesus, which causes the leaders to panic. To them, this is really getting out of hand. They'll have an insurrection and a Roman reprisal on their hands – precisely what they feared (12:19).

We now see the significant indicator that Jesus' mission is reaching its climax. Some Greek-speaking Jews are in Jerusalem for Passover as the Torah requires, and they approach Philip and ask to see Jesus. News about Jesus is spreading beyond the confines of Judea, just as His kingdom will in the book of Acts. When learning of this, Jesus declares that it's time for the "seed to die and produce much fruit," i.e., His death. As we've seen throughout the last ~2,000 years, Jesus' death has brought life to millions and millions of people. Upon facing His approaching death, does Jesus ask to be spared from it? No. His death is precisely why He came, and it's to glorify His Father (12:27-28).

As Jesus prays, His Father answers, and to the onlookers, it sounds like thunder (Gee, kind of like God speaking from Mount Sinai). Jesus announces that soon, "the ruler of this world," Satan, is about to be dethroned. How? After Jesus is "lifted up" (crucified), Satan will no longer be able to keep people under his influence because of their enslavement to their sinful nature. Satan will be powerless to retain his subjects by force or other means.

Again, the people struggle with who the Messiah is and what He will do. Jesus doesn't explain it to them and warns them their window of opportunity is closing. All they need to do is accept what He's saying (12:36).

Chapter 12 closes with two quick talks by John and Jesus. John summarizes Jesus' work by quoting a short section from Isaiah 53:1-12, the Suffering Servant, which He points us toward to explain *why* Jesus must be "lifted up," which is John's way of answering the questions in verse 12:34. Then he quotes Isaiah 6:10 to explain why they didn't understand what Jesus was saying. God wanted many of His people to be blind and deaf about His plan *until* He completed His work.

Jesus' summarizes His mission: If you believe and receive Him, you do the same for the Father. Jesus came to reveal spiritual truth, the light/revelation of God. His mission at that time was not to judge people but to save them. When He returns at the End as the Son of Man, *that* will be judgment time. So sayeth the Father through Jesus.

INSIGHT

How often have we cried out to God for help, and nothing comes right away? We clearly see that things will get even worse if God doesn't intervene, so why doesn't God answer? Because God has His timing. A greater challenge means greater glory for God. But our objection usually boils down to, "But what about ME, Lord?" Yes, what about you? It takes a long spiritual lens to see that "... all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

We want the "sickness is healed, and all trouble quickly goes away" solution when God wants the "sit back, trust Me, and watch the magnificent things I can do and I'll take you *through* all the trouble" solution. Be patient. Be strong. Trust the Lord. Even if the worst happens in this life, you'll never miss the best as it continues across the threshold. Eternity with Jesus awaits.

November 7 : Scriptures John 13-15

SUMMARY

Today's section of *Cruisin' Through the Bible* centers on the Last Passover, beginning with the famous foot-washing episode. What makes this so remarkable is the setup. Jesus knows His time has come. It's after sunset on Passover day, and He'll be dead in less than 24 hours (13:1). Still, His thoughts and feelings are for the men who've faithfully stayed with Him during His entire ministry time—even loving the betrayer, Judas, whom Satan had already prompted to get Jesus killed.

Here's the astonishing opening. Jesus knew everything, where He had come from and where He was going. His Father had given everything into His control. You would think that would make someone feel special and worthy of being waited on hand and foot. Instead, Jesus put on a servant's clothes, and as a lowly servant, He stooped to serve by doing one of the lowest tasks a slave would do – wash someone's feet. In the Middle East, feet are considered a "low" body part (pun intended). To show the bottom of one's foot to another is an insult, and another insult is to throw your shoe at another person. So, for Jesus to touch His disciples' feet and wash them is a profound act of abasing Himself.

Stunningly, Jesus tells them they are always to have a servant's mind and heart. Besides the foot-washing, Jesus is also about to serve humanity in the most profound way possible; to take our sin upon Himself and die for us. Do you also realize Jesus washed Judas' feet?

Peter doesn't want Jesus to serve him. In a clever bit of wordplay, Jesus says He has to wash Peter's feet because "If I don't wash you, you have no part with me" (13:8), referring not to physical washing but to spiritual cleansing that will come from Jesus' approaching sacrifice. Of course, Peter misunderstands Jesus and wants the whole-body wash, and Jesus lovingly responds, "One who has bathed doesn't need to wash anything except his feet, but he is completely clean." Jesus means those who come to Him don't need to be saved repeatedly. However, because of sinful thoughts, words, and deeds that we partake in as we "walk" through life, our "feet get dirty." We need to confess and be cleansed, not resaved. Jesus teaches them about servanthood and salvation.

But Jesus knows Judas isn't "clean" because he's being influenced by Satan (13:11).

After the foot washing time, Jesus explains His actions (13:12-17). However, Jesus uses the topic to bring up a thing about feet that lets them know He's about to be betrayed (13:18). In other words, what's about to happen is no accident, and Jesus knows full well

about it and is in complete control. As He hands a morsel of food to Judas (*who is reclining right next to Him!*), Satan enters Judas and moves the betrayer to complete his plan. Judas will go to the leaders and tell them where Jesus will be after the Passover meal.

“And it was night.” Remember that I said John uses light for God and righteousness and dark for the enemy and wickedness? John’s phrase, “And it was night,” is ominous and shows evil is in play, moving against the Light of the World to snuff it out (13:30).

But what Satan intends for evil is precisely the thing that will bring Jesus His greatest glory – sacrificing Himself to save humanity (13:31-32). Alluding to His death, Jesus prepares His disciples for what’s coming.

The rest of the reading is Jesus’ final goodbye discourse. According to my Study Bible (paraphrased), this is similar to Moses’ goodbye in Deuteronomy 31-33. “I’m going to die and leave you, and you’ll face a great challenge after that. This person will succeed Me. Stay faithful to God. Here are God’s covenant promises, and now I’ll bless you.”

As Moses gave commands, so Jesus gives commands. Both of them commanded their followers to love others. Moses’ command is to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus modifies it to “Love one another as I have loved you,” meaning wholeheartedly and sacrificially, for that will be the singular distinguishing characteristic of all Jesus’ true disciples (13:34-35).

Impetuous Peter hears again that Jesus is leaving them. Not knowing what Jesus means, Peter says he’ll follow Jesus, even dying for Jesus. But Jesus tells Peter that he got the word wrong. Peter won’t die for Jesus. He will deny Him (13:38).

Chapters 14 and 15 reveal a lot of spiritual truths and promises. Jesus is preparing a place for us to live with Him after we die. First, He’s preparing the way there (14:6) and then preparing a place to live with Him in heaven with the Father (14:3) before He returns to earth.

Since Jesus brought up the topic of the Father, Philip asks for a more profound revelation of the Father. After all, Moses asked God to show him His glory, and Philip seems to be doing something similar. Jesus tells Philip the best revelation of the Father is by looking at Jesus. People don’t grasp God’s divinity too well, and the best way for God to show us what He’s like is to put it in our frame of reference – a divine human. Looking at Jesus is looking at the Father. They are “one” in the Old Covenant language. They are so one, they are essentially the same being yet different persons (14:9-11). If Philip can’t believe

what Jesus says, at least look at the works He does. Only God can do those things, which should convince him of Jesus' claim to be one with His Father.

And then comes some exciting news! Jesus tells them they'll be able to do the things He's been doing because He's going to the Father, meaning He will have finished His work. His disciples are His successors; as such, they do what He's been doing. Praying in Jesus' name means being aligned with their Heavenly Father's will and purposes with Jesus' delegated authority (14:12-14).

But they need someone else to help them – the Holy Spirit. The disciples may have Jesus' delegated authority to do His works, but like Jesus, they need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. See? Jesus is our model – a God-obedient person empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is for believers only (14:17).

The best way to summarize 14:18-24 is “covenant faithfulness.” Jesus talks a lot about loving Him and keeping His commands. To love a covenant partner means remaining faithful to them, and keeping commands is obeying the covenant terms, which is the way to prove active covenant faithfulness. With that understanding in mind, read through those verses and see how they jump out to you. Also, that active covenant relationship involves the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with you. How cool is that?

When you're in Israel, you say *shalom*, peace, as a greeting or a goodbye. In 14:27, Jesus is saying goodbye, for now. He knows they don't understand what's going on or what's going to happen. If they did, they'd be excited that He's “leaving” because of what that means. However, Jesus will leave because “the ruler of the world is coming” (14:30). Satan is at work to have Jesus arrested and killed to get rid of Him. But when that happens, the disciples shouldn't despair as Satan has no power over Jesus.

Jesus continues His parting remarks in chapter 15 with an analogy. “I am the vine” is Jesus' last “I AM” statement in John. The upshot is His disciples have to stay in covenant with Him. When we're born-again, we “connect” to Jesus, and His life flows through us via His Holy Spirit living in us. As the Holy Spirit works in us, we produce “fruit,” a good life with good works in increasing measure and amounts. Our lives should conform to God's character as Jesus demonstrated and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) describes (15:4).

Fruitless branches are removed, and fruitful branches are pruned to increase productivity. In other words, Judas illustrates the first scenario, and Peter illustrates the second. Therefore, in covenant language, we must stay faithful to our New Covenant

partner by obeying His commands. Following Jesus' commands should shape how we think, speak, and act; this isn't something we can do in our strength. We *must* have the Holy Spirit's help to do it because our old habits and practices, driven by our untamed desires, push us to live in ungodly ways (15:5). If we walk away from Jesus, we'll show it by not living God's way. We eventually risk being cut off from the covenant (15:6). But if we stay connected to Jesus, we can ask for the Father's help, and through our godly lives, we glorify Him and prove that we're Jesus' followers (15:8).

Jesus reminds His disciples they must stay loyal to Him and His Father just as He's utterly loyal to His Father (15:9, Love = covenant loyalty). Being loyal and faithful means ongoing obedience, but obedience is not supposed to be a downer. Obedience should bring us joy because we please the Lord (15:11).

And how do we stay loyal to our fellow believers? By following Jesus' example of "laying down his life" for them. No, not necessarily dying (although in some cases of martyrdom, that's an example of great love and dedication), but dying to our needs and wants to help someone else.

We come to a marvelous transition in the disciples' relationship with Jesus. They get a promotion of sorts. As disciples, they serve their rabbi as their master. As His taught and trained disciples, Jesus now calls them His friends. Not that they weren't friends before, but friends in the sense that friends tell each other things they say to no one else and reveal hidden things because they trust each other (15:15). Jesus reminds them that He chose them first and to learn to live His way, the new way of the New Covenant. As they stay aligned with that purpose (producing fruit), they'll be able to ask Jesus' Father for what they want, and He'll give it to them. Of course, this means if the request also lines up with the Father's will (1 John 5:14).

But this new relationship with Jesus and the Father comes with a risk and a cost – the possibility (probability) of persecution. They shouldn't be surprised if the world hates them because the spiritually lost world hates God. Sin came from rebellion, and we live in a world tuned for rebellion against God. It's a human/satanic kingdom vs. God's kingdom, and never the two shall meet. There will *always* be strife and conflict between them. Anyone who tries to befriend the world will ultimately pay for their foolishness. If you leave the kingdom of darkness through salvation, you are automatically set against your former allies. You have switched sides and, to them, committed treason. Therefore, in the lost world's eyes, you deserve punishment, which is persecution. Don't be surprised. Look at how they treated Jesus; you've pledged allegiance to Him. "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (15:20). Jesus came to reveal God's truth

about Himself to the world, accompanied by good works and God-glorifying signs. Regardless, the world's instinctive hatred of God caused them to reject Jesus, confirming their sinful state, liable to God's judgment.

However, Jesus' disciples won't face the world's rejection alone. A primary part of Jesus' New Covenant is the Holy Spirit coming to live in us (15:26-27). He will help us testify about Jesus by doing it through us in word and deed.

INSIGHT

Do you realize what a gift we have – God *living in us* through the resident Holy Spirit? As believers, we have access to God's truth because the Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (14:17, 16:13). He is like Jesus living in and with us since He, Jesus, and the Father are, in essence, One. That's why we're not left alone like orphans because the Father and the Son are with us through the Holy Spirit's presence (14:18). The Spirit is with us to teach and remind us about God's word because that helps us think, speak, and act like Jesus (14:26). Furthermore, as we allow the Spirit to shape every aspect of our lives, we will become walking testimonies to Jesus in our words and deeds (good works and spiritual gifts).

The greatest gift we've ever been given is our salvation and the Holy Spirit taking the steering wheel of our lives is a core part of that. Learn to communicate and interact with the Holy Spirit because we need Him to become what our Father wants us to be. Oh, and it's fun!