
October 22 : Scriptures Mark 7-9

SUMMARY

We start today's reading with an episode about unwashed hands. The confrontation isn't about breaking the Torah's laws but about violating man-made traditions that assume the weight of God's Torah commands. In short, is it in the Bible or not? Don't laugh because we Christians have done the same thing over the years – not going to movies, not wearing make-up, prohibiting alcohol use when unnecessary, and not listening to certain kinds of music. Oh, and don't get me started on which style of music is "the only appropriate music for a worship service." Commands based on preferences and non-biblical human logic or intentions are open to challenge.

For the benefit of his non-Jewish readers, Mark (or some future scribe, perhaps) inserts a parenthesis to explain what's going on. "For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, *keeping the tradition of the elders*. When they come from the marketplace, *they do not eat unless they have washed*. And there are many other customs they have received and keep, *like the washing of cups, pitchers, kettles, and dining couches*" (7:3-4, italics author). This practice derives from the Temple priests needing to ceremonially wash before serving God (Exodus 30:18-20).

Jesus answers their question with a resounding rebuke that the leaders were more concerned about their man-made laws and practices than God and His commands. "Abandoning the command of God, you hold on to human tradition... You have a fine way of invalidating God's command in order to set up your tradition!" (7:8-9). Yes, they not only abandoned God's laws, but in some cases, the Pharisees outright *negated* them!

Jesus gives them a blistering example (7:10-13). The leaders would rather give a sacrifice to God (an animal or funds) than provide help to their needy parents. Jesus points to their use of *corban*, a vowed sacrifice, *to negate their God-commanded obligation to their parents!* Jesus asks them, "Which is more important? A sacrifice to God or helping one's parents? God would rather you help your parents than take what is due them and sacrifice it to God, even to the point of using God's command to justify your disobedience and heartlessness." And here is Jesus' knock-out punch, "You nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many other similar things."

Rabbi Jesus clarifies what defiles a person. Jesus follows the Torah perfectly, so of course, He's not saying the ceremonial commands of the Torah about spiritual defilement and contamination don't apply. Jesus reinforces that there are far worse things that defile a person, and a real defilement that's worse than a ceremonial one. Sin defiles us far worse

than ceremonial “uncleanness,” The source of that defilement comes from sin that starts within us (our hearts and minds, attitudes, feelings, and thoughts). All these evil things come from within and defile a person according to God (7:20-23).

From there, Jesus goes to the region of Tyre and Sidon, which we covered in Matthew 15. This account is about the Gentile woman’s faith and her demonized daughter. While God’s kingdom is for all people, Jesus was sent to focus His appeal on His people first. The Father wasn’t excluding the Gentiles when Jesus was on earth. It wasn’t time yet to extend the invitation into His Kingdom to the Gentiles. That will come *after* the Holy Spirit arrives in Acts 2. Mark’s point is like Matthew’s: Jesus’ compassion extends beyond an ethnic group to all people, and He’s moved when someone comes to Him in humility.

Jesus next travels from Tyre and Sidon back to the north shore of the Sea of Galilee and around to its east side. We see a fascinating account of Jesus healing a deaf man with a speech impediment, likely caused by his deafness. The words “sighed deeply” mean Jesus groaned deep within Himself, showing that He was sincerely emotionally touched. *Viola!* The guy is healed, and he can hear and speak clearly. Jesus tells the guy and everyone else to keep quiet which strikes me as funny since Jesus has just restored the man’s speaking ability. “Okay, you can talk. Now, don’t say anything about it!”

Why should the man and those who witnessed his healing not tell everyone what Jesus had done? Likely because Jesus was in the Decapolis, a region east of the Sea of Galilee, a Gentile-Jewish area. Jesus was sent to the Jewish people first. Despite that, the people excitedly spoke of Jesus’ miracle, and now the region had its second testimony walking around along with the once-demonized man (or “men” per Matthew). Before you read on, please note the parenthetical insert as Mark explains what *Ephphatha* (Be opened!) means. This explanation suggests that Mark is thinking of his non-Jewish readers.

Chapter 8 opens with another mass feeding that involves four thousand people with seven baskets of food remaining. In contrast, the previous event was for five thousand people with twelve baskets of leftovers.

Mark then moves from bread to leaven. Mark points out, as Matthew did, that the leaven Jesus refers to is the Pharisees’ teachings that lead to hypocrisy (per Luke). However, Mark includes Jesus’ reference to Herod’s political machinations, i.e., the quest for power and influence. Like Matthew, Mark shows Jesus’s amazement that His disciples miss His point. “It’s not about leaven, guys. I’m referring to false teachings and the ways of the world. Avoid them both.”

Mark 8:22 is where Jesus turns toward Jerusalem for His final ministry period before His crucifixion. Jesus is in Bethsaida, Philip, Andrew, and Peter's hometown on the Sea's north shore. Some loving people bring a blind man to Jesus for healing, but Jesus does something akin to what He did when He raised Jairus' daughter. He isolates the afflicted person away from other people. In the Jairus' daughter event, Jesus excludes those who displayed their lack of trust by ridiculing Him. So, could there have been an element of doubt working amongst the blind man's friends? Possibly. Notably, the man's eyesight is only partially restored after Jesus' first attempt. This healing is the only time the Bible speaks of where Jesus' work had only a partial effect at first. Perhaps Jesus was fighting doubt in the man? Or maybe Jesus saw that the man had doubts about Jesus' ability to help him. In that case, the healing, although partial, seems to be enough to shore up the man's trust in Jesus to receive a complete recovery.

After this event, Jesus and His disciples walk north to Caesarea Philippi and Mount Hermon. You may recall this is where Jesus was Transfigured and began His journey to Jerusalem to be crucified. Here in Caesarea, we read Peter's confession, which is the core of Mark's Gospel (8:27-30). Peter's confession precedes the Transfiguration that we also read about in the Matthew 17 account, but Mark's version is shorter. Matthew has a more detailed rendering.

Jesus initiates the conversation by asking, "Who do people say I am?" The disciples reply that their fellow Jews think Jesus is one of the biggies; John the Baptist brought to life, Elijah the Prophet returned from heaven, or a different prophet. But the correct answer that Mark points out is what Peter says, "You are the Messiah" (8:29). Up to this point, only the Father and demons have proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, and Peter is the first person to do so (per my Study Bible). Jesus affirms Peter's answer, but why would Jesus be so firm about His disciples not telling anyone? It's likely due to the popular misconception of the day about Israel's Messiah being a political ruler who would drive out the Roman oppressors. That's not Jesus' mission right now. He has a bigger enemy to fight and drive out – death, sin, and the kingdom of darkness.

As we cruise along, Mark records Jesus prophesying His death. This prediction is the first time in Mark that Jesus reveals what's coming, and Peter strenuously objects to what Jesus declares. Why did Peter reject Jesus' prophecy about His death and resurrection? Peter correctly identified Jesus as Israel's Messiah, and Jesus affirmed it. But now, the errant messianic ideas kick in. How can Israel's Messiah die and still be Israel's Messiah? Ridiculous. And impetuous Peter says so, trying to dispel such a crazy idea from Jesus' head. Except it was Peter, who had the crazy idea. When Jesus tells you something outside your conventional thinking, I doubt it's Jesus who is wrong.

Furthermore, even though Jesus knows He's Israel's Messiah and rightful heir to David's throne, He's willing to deny Himself to achieve what His Father wants, *and that's the bottom line attitude Jesus' disciples must have – willing self-denial to see God's will obeyed.* The way to eternal life is God's will, and the Father's is "that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40). Refusing the Father's will to save our life will cause us to lose our eternal life. Being willing to even lose our earthly life for the sake of the Father's will is the commitment that leads us to eternal life. Besides, what disciple wants Jesus to be ashamed of them on that Day because they wanted to live their "best life now?" I believe the operative term is *delayed gratification.*

By disregarding the chapter numbers between chapters 8 & 9, do you catch the flow of Mark's Gospel account? 1) Peter: "You are the Messiah." Jesus: "Yes, I am." 2) Jesus: "This is what the Messiah will do. Peter: "No way, Messiah. That doesn't fit what I believe." Jesus: "Then step back, Peter, because you're opposing My Father's will, and that will make you like His Adversary, Satan." 3) Jesus: "Listen, guys. Being My disciple is about putting aside what you want and doing what My Father wants, just like I'm doing. Don't make me ashamed of you." 4) Jesus: "Hey, Peter, James, and John. Come with Me up Mount Hermon. I have something to show you."

And show them He does. They see with their own eyes that Jesus is *more* than a human Messiah. He's the God-Man, the Son of Man. Jesus gives them a full-on reveal of His dual nature to help "adjust their thinking" regarding their misconception about His impending death. It doesn't all fit together for the three guys right now, but it will later help them get through the events of Jesus' crucifixion. For now, the three are dazzled by what they see, and when you read of Jesus' dazzling white appearance, "extremely white as no launderer on earth could whiten them" (9:3), the Bible is talking about God's physical glory.

Again, the guys' mindset is challenged to change, but they can't talk about it. "He ordered them to tell no one what they had seen *until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.* They kept this word to themselves, questioning what "rising from the dead" meant" (9:9-10). Why did they question what "rising from the dead" meant? Because Peter, James, and John know about the Son of Man, the divine human in heaven, in Daniel 7. The Son of Man is not a person who can die because only immortal beings can exist in heaven with God. But Jesus just said He was the Son of Man *who will rise from the dead,* which means He will have to die first. In other words, *the Messiah who must live will die, and the Son of Man who can't die will die and live again.* Do you see how confusing this was for them? Jesus

is readjusting their preconceptions about the Son of God (the Messiah)/Son of Man to help align their understanding with His Father's plan. And the rest of the disciples and the Jewish people will face this same theological readjustment later.

Right after the Transfiguration, Jesus and His three-person entourage meet up with the rest of the gang, who have been trying to drive out a demon. Jesus' disciples are arguing with some local scribes, likely about how to conduct a proper exorcism or the fact that the disciples are doing it "in Jesus' name." Perhaps this led to a debate about Jesus' legitimacy.

In this instance, Mark's account is twice as long as Matthew's and gives us more insight. The focal point is on belief, i.e., trust in Jesus. When Jesus shows up, the people are super-excited ("utterly astounded," it says) because the rock-star rabbi has appeared! When Jesus asks about the argument, the demonized boy's father says, "I asked your disciples to drive it out, but they couldn't" (9:18).

I love the fact that Jesus could show frustration and still be sinless. He laments their lack of trust in Him and His Father as the core reason they were unsuccessful (9:19). To Jesus, this lack of faith characterizes this generation and frustrates Him. When the demon in the boy sees Jesus, it reacts violently in a way that looks like epilepsy, but the fact that it was a response to Jesus' presence speaks to its demonic cause.

The man appeals to Jesus' compassion and asks, "But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us" (9:22). What? *If?* Where'd the father get that idea? Well, disciples reflect their rabbi, and if Jesus' disciples can't drive out this demon, maybe Jesus can't. Nonsense, Jesus replies. All the father needs to do is trust Him. The Father's power is greater than any power in the natural and supernatural realm. The man believes Jesus but needs more help trusting God. So, Jesus helps and drives out the demon (9:26-27).

However, we get a fascinating insight at the end of the account. Some demonic forces are very powerful and can resist God's power more than other demons. The requisite "prayer and fasting" are things we do to prepare ourselves, to help us become more spiritually tuned to the Lord, and to solidify our trust in Him. This case was one such example. It took God's direct intervention to drive the demon from the boy.

After this incident, Mark immediately jumps to the south. Jesus and the disciples are now on the north side of the Sea of Galilee, no short walk, and along the way to Capernaum, Jesus drops the second prophecy of His death and resurrection. Again, the guys don't get it.

Jesus arrives in Capernaum, His home base (9:33). Again, we have the account of the disciples arguing about who is the greatest. I wonder if this was spawned because only Peter, James, and John had been selected to go with Jesus up the Mount of Transfiguration, with the other disciples left at the bottom of the mountain, unable to drive out a demon. Was "If we were there, we could have cast out the demon" spoken out loud? When Jesus breaks into their argument, none of the disciples want to be "great enough" to answer Him. But as usual, Jesus already knows the issue. Lesson time! As rabbis do, Jesus sits to teach. His lesson is that God's kingdom values are far different from the world's. It's not the people who are aggressive, assertive, domineering, and powerful who are great. The truly powerful in God's kingdom are those who can master themselves and be like little children who are humble before their parents and obey by serving them (9:35-36). Humility and humble service mark who is great in God's kingdom.

Speaking of "who is great" in God's kingdom, John rats out a man casting out demons in Jesus' name without being officially affiliated with Jesus and His kingdom movement (9:38). But Jesus isn't worried. In fact, it's a good thing. When someone realizes that Jesus is who He says He is by virtue of His authority and power, how can that person oppose Jesus in the future? Though unaffiliated, the guy doing the exorcism proves Jesus is legit, and not opposing Jesus is better than outright opposition. Further, if someone does something nice in Jesus' name, like offering a disciple a drink of water, they have gained God's reward (9:41). No, we're not talking about salvation here. We're talking about God showing His approval of even the smallest act of kindness to one of Jesus' followers because they are affiliated with Him. It's along the lines of the "Do it for one of my little ones (disciple), you've done it for Me" principle.

By the way, my Study Bible points out that it's ironic the disciples affiliated with Jesus recently had no success driving out a demon while this unaffiliated man is. Humbling, isn't it? *Maybe that's Mark's point?*

Jesus goes on. As opposed to doing good to one of Jesus' followers, what if anyone (disciple or not) does something terrible to one of Jesus' followers, causing that follower to walk away from Him (9:42)? Don't worry. There's a millstone with their name on it. In other words, it would be better for them to drown than face Jesus for hurting one of His followers, especially the immature and inexperienced ones. Therefore, Jesus teaches His disciples that they should do all they can not to hurt their fellow disciples, *especially if one has the grossly mistaken idea that they're "greater," more important or significant, than another disciple* (9:43-48).

The salt reference is for two purposes. Salt is used as part of a Temple sacrifice on God's table (the Altar). Salt is a sign of a covenant's eternality because salt forever retains its flavor (Exodus 43:24). However, if salt loses its flavor, it's no longer salt. If a disciple loses their discipleship-ness (as evidenced by their concern about their greatness, for example), that isn't good. Matthew says such "saltless salt" isn't worth anything and discarded. "So be the disciples I called you to be, guys, and be at peace!" (9:50).

INSIGHT

Why did Jesus wait to give the Good News of salvation to the Gentiles? I believe that, in part, it was to build a solid foundation because the Jews were familiar with God and His Torah commands. The Jewish people qualified because they are Abraham's physical descendants via a miracle (Isaac's conception). The Gentiles aren't. However, through the Holy Spirit's spiritual regeneration, God miraculously creates another family line among the Gentiles, a born-again family through whom He will also work. At this point in Mark's Gospel timeline, that won't happen until Jesus sends the Holy Spirit (Acts 10). When the Holy Spirit fills the believing Gentiles, *then* the two human family lines (Abraham's children by birth and adoption) will merge, but only through faith in Jesus. The Jews enter the kingdom with the Gentiles by faith, and the Gentiles bond with Israel by faith.

October 23 : Scriptures Mark 10-12

SUMMARY

Jesus finishes His talk and moves out right away. Mark's action hero is on the move! Jesus and the disciples travel southeast to the Judea region and across the Jordan River (10:1). The crowds appear, and they converge on Jesus. Naturally, the Pharisees approach Jesus to check out His rabbinic credentials with a Torah question. Mark's account slightly differs from Matthew's "divorce for any reason" question. The Pharisees' question is about whether divorce is against the Torah (10:2). Jesus answers their question with a question (a very Jewish way of debating and teaching), "What did Moses command you?" Their answer is more accurate in that Moses *permitted* divorce so long as the husband provided proof that he and his wife had a legitimate divorce. Without the divorce paper (called a *get*), no man could be sure if the woman he was interested in was genuinely available for marriage.

Jesus gets to the heart of the matter. "Just because God gave you the means to get divorced, it's not His design nor desire" (10:5-9). That means a struggling couple should do everything possible to preserve their marriage from divorce. However, God knows that hearts get hardened, and some circumstances warrant divorces, such as adultery and abandonment, and has made provision for the former husband and wife to be protected from accusation. That's Jesus' point: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. Also, if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (10:11-12). If the divorce is not ended per the Torah's requirement, then the couple is not "officially" divorced, ergo adultery. However, if they are officially divorced, then there can be no adultery unless you're the person who believes "once married, always married until the death of one's partner." But for that position, you have to deny the Torah's allowance for divorce and Jesus' and Paul's legitimate reasons for divorce.

We now move to people bringing children to Jesus for His blessing and the disciples rebuking them. "Whaddya doin'? Can't ya see the Master is busy and way too important for such frivolous stuff?" Jesus is *extremely indignant* (Mark's *action* words) that His disciples would rebuke parents from bringing children to Him! The Greek term for indignant (10:14) refers to an intense feeling of "to be pained; to be angry, vexed." Jesus becomes indignant and unloads a rebuke on His men, which He turns into a teachable moment about receiving God's kingdom. When you offer a gift to a child, they take it without demanding any right or claim to it. They just accept it and the blessing attached to the gift. The disciples need to learn that.

Then comes the rich young ruler account. The young man doesn't realize it's not about keeping the Torah commands as much as what keeps his heart. We can do all God commands, but if that's all that constitutes our life with God, we're severely missing it. It's beautiful that even though the guy is off track, Jesus "loved him" (10:21). The guy is doing the best he can, and the text shows Jesus' love and appreciation. However, for the rich young man to remain rich in God's kingdom, he has to surrender everything that keeps his heart from being given over wholly to the Father – his wealth. Sadly, the young man struggles with that, and we don't know what he decides, his wealth or following God wholeheartedly (10:22).

That leads us to Jesus' discourse on how hard it is for materially focused people to enter God's kingdom. Their hearts are anchored in the things of this world and are often unwilling to "weigh anchor" to be blown into God's kingdom. Take a moment to consider this. Don't think of what you *would* give up for the Lord. Consider what you *wouldn't* give up for the Lord. Ask the Holy Spirit to put His finger on what would be difficult for you to surrender should Jesus make the request. Will you wind up walking away sad, too?

In response to Peter's question, Jesus reassures that all who surrender anything for Jesus' sake will receive in kind in the future. Therefore, we should never let our possessions or anything, even family relationships, determine how we live our lives for God. God has everything covered, so let's stay true to the task of living for Jesus.

Mark then moves to Jesus' ascent to Jerusalem from the Jordan River Valley. It's fascinating to note that as Jesus led the way, the disciples were astonished/amazed/awestruck that their rabbi would be so fearless as to walk into the very heart of the opposition resolutely. The inner circle wasn't afraid, as it says of Jesus' other followers, probably because they knew Jesus' authority and power. But still, Jerusalem is a dangerous destination for them.

They know the Passover is approaching, and the Torah required every Jewish man to come to Jerusalem if he could. As we read, we get the feeling of inevitability – the disciples know the requirement, but more so, Jesus knows His Father's will. Along the way, Jesus reveals for a third time what they are walking into, and Jesus includes more details. The Jewish leadership will condemn Him (the Son of Man) to death, but the Gentiles (the Romans) will mock, humiliate, torture, and kill Jesus. *But* there's that addendum about rising "after three days" (10:36).

Seeing that Jesus is heading toward Jerusalem, James and John figure it's time to jockey for position in their Messiah's soon-to-come kingdom. (In Matthew's account, the brothers' mom asks the question.) They ask that when Jesus starts His glorious kingdom and reigns on His throne, "Allow us to sit at your right and at your left in your glory" (10:37). Jesus replies, "You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink or to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

To "drink a cup" is an idiom that means to meet one's fate. James and John want to share Jesus' destiny as Israel's top leaders, but they certainly don't know that it means death before exaltation. As a matter of record, they *will* share in Jesus' fate of persecution and execution. All the disciples' lives ended by execution except for John, but he had to endure Roman torture and exile on the Isle of Patmos.

Yes, James and John don't know what they're asking, but the rest of the disciples get their intent, and indignation breaks out among the men. It's time for another teachable moment. The quest for the right and left seats beside God's Messiah isn't about ruling. It's about serving. Jesus is their prime example. The Son of Man is the Ancient of Day's agent who carries God's complete authority over the kingdom. Yet, Jesus came to serve those rebelling against His Father and to die for them so they could "come home." To give one's life for another is the supreme act of service and even more meaningful the less deserving the recipient is. Someday, the disciples will know this.

This last discussion takes place as Jesus is en route from the east side of the Jordan River (likely near where He was baptized and His Father proclaimed Jesus as Israel's Messiah.) Once the group crossed the Jordan and the river valley, the road to Jerusalem would take them through the famous town of Jericho (10:46). On His way out of Jericho, a blind man calls Jesus "the Son of David" and begs Him to heal his eyes. To me, the main point of this is not the man tossing away his official beggar's cloak or another miraculous healing. Jesus is called David's son (a direct reference to being Israel's Anointed and Rightful King), followed by Jesus accepting the accolade via a confirmed healing. O, Jerusalem! Your King approaches.

Chapter 11 marks Jesus' Messiah announcement parade. If you want more insights, please see what I wrote for Matthew 21. Mark is more concise than Matthew. He notes that Jesus goes into the Temple, looks around, and departs for Bethany because He and the team were staying at Martha, Mary, and Lazarus' home during the four days leading up to Passover. Mark says nothing about Jesus' booting out the moneychangers and sacrificial animal businesses or the leadership's challenge to Jesus about His authority to do such things. According to Matthew, this event happened on Sunday.

The next day, Jesus encounters the barren fig tree and curses it (11:12-14, as an example for later), and then He goes on a little “house cleaning” effort in the Temple (11:15-17). This is typical, Mark. There’s some emphasis on necessary teaching, but his purpose is to show Israel’s Messiah in action! When the day is done, Jesus and the guys retire to Bethany after a very busy Monday.

The following day (Tuesday), the disciples take note of the cursed fig tree’s withered condition (11:21). Even though the cursed fig tree portends something worse (Israel’s destruction for rejecting her Messiah), Jesus uses the moment to teach the disciples that it’s easy to perform remarkable works if you have the required trust in God. When we pray, we must trustfully come to God with everything and anything on our hearts and minds. Whether our Father will answer our prayers the way we want Him to is entirely up to Him. But that shouldn’t prevent us from sharing all our concerns, joys, troubles, pain, and pleasure with the Father, who works so powerfully on His children’s behalf.

If I read this correctly, according to Mark, Jesus was quizzed from Tuesday to Wednesday, taught His End Time seminar on Wednesday or Thursday, and prepared for Passover on Thursday afternoon. Passover began at sundown on Thursday and ended about three hours after Jesus died the following day, on Friday (Day 1, because any part of a day counts as a day, Hebraically speaking). Jesus remained in the tomb all Saturday (Day 2). The third day started at sundown on Saturday (the 7th day, the Sabbath), and Jesus rose at dawn on Sunday, the first day of the week. Got it? Let’s move on.

Here we go! Mark has the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders asking for Jesus’ authority credentials (11:27-33). Jesus tells them He’s functioning under the same authority that John the Baptist was, which we know was the Father’s authority. But since the leaders don’t want to affirm Jesus’ authority, they refuse to answer Jesus’ question about the source of John’s authority. Isn’t it interesting that people sometimes refuse to be honest when it means they must face the truth?

Chapter 12 covers the same material we read in Matthew 21-22. In both Gospels, the Parable of the Vineyard Owner is similar to Isaiah 5:1-7 in which Israel is described as a vineyard. Isaiah’s point is the Lord created Israel to be His vineyard. A viable vineyard is supposed to bear fruit for the owner. According to Isaiah, because it didn’t, the owner broke down its protecting wall and allowed it to be destroyed because it was fruitless and, thus, worthless. According to Isaiah, this is why God decided to do that to Israel. “For the vineyard of the Lord of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah, the plant he delighted in. He expected justice but saw injustice; he expected righteousness but heard cries of despair” (Isaiah 5:7). It was Judah’s lack of fruit and rotten fruit that

caused the Lord to call for the Babylonians to wipe out Jerusalem and its leadership in 586 B.C. Can you guess what Jesus is suggesting?

As I wrote in the Matthew section, Jesus is on a fruit inspection tour on behalf of His Father, the Vineyard Owner. The tenant farmers (Israel's leaders) show that they wanted the vineyard (Israel) for themselves (12:3). They will even stoop to murdering the Owner's Son to keep their grip on the goods (12:7). But they won't succeed. Regardless of what they do, the Son will prevail and take ownership of the vineyard because it's already been prophesied that He will (12:10-11).

I'll leave Mark 12:13-37 for you to read and check out the commentary on Matthew 22. However, there are two things Mark has here for us to note; a warning to the scribes and Jesus' commendation for the widow who gave a tremendous gift.

The warning to the scribes echoes Jesus' harsh condemnation of the leaders for making such a hypocritical show of their supposed piety. As an exercise, can you think of ways we Christians do the same kinds of things? What can we do to avoid falling under conviction for hypocritical piety?

In contrast to the leaders' pretend piety, the widow's gift demonstrates her true righteousness and turns the world's values upside down. It's not the people who give much out of their abundance that receive the highest praise. Jesus' commendation is for those who give sacrificially out of their lack. The woman's identification as a widow means she has no husband to provide income. The fact that the woman Jesus saw was so poor indicates she had no family to help her. Giving the tiny amount out of her poverty brought her the approval of the One who could provide her with everything!

INSIGHT

According to Jesus, the *true value* of a gift to God is determined by the sacrifice attached (Mark 12:43-44). So don't sweat it, and give your best.

October 24 : Scriptures Mark 13-16

SUMMARY

“As he was going out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Teacher, look! What massive stones! What impressive buildings!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another—all will be thrown down’” (Mark 13:1-2)

That’s an astounding statement by Jesus. Imagine walking through Washington, D.C., with Jesus and remarking about all the fabulous architecture on the Mall – The White House, the U.S. Capitol, the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, the National Gallery of Art, and the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum among other majestic landmarks. As you’re pointing out the buildings, Jesus stops and says the same thing He said to His disciples, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another—all will be thrown down.”

Ummmm, say what, Jesus?

After hearing that from a guy you know as a prophet, Israel’s Messiah, and mighty man of God, you’d want to ask some follow-up questions as the disciples did in 13:4, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished.”

Some people regard time as a circle turning around and around. That thinking is reflected in karma (what goes around, comes around) and “The Circle of Life,” as seen in *The Lion King* movie. Hebraic thinking, coupled with what God has revealed, considers that circle like a bike tire running along the ground but with an eventual destination.

Yes, Hebraic thought considers circular motions such as seasons and moon cycles, and Israeli agriculture and the biblical Feasts of the Lord are based on those cycles. But the final destination idea is still coupled with it. That “circular turning while moving forward to an endpoint” is deeply ingrained in the biblical mindset.

This endpoint toward which the wheel of human existence rolls is essential. The line behind is history, the line ahead is prophecy, and we’re all inexorably moving toward that endpoint within that cyclical yearly turning. If we go by the Bible, most of us won’t live to the end, the point at which God steps in to change His world. However, some will, and that’s exciting! But that’s not to say the End is something to be greatly desired either. I get it. Jesus promised to return, and He will keep His word. But if you’re a student of

scripture, you know there's a whole lot of trouble in the offing before that Day arrives. I don't know about you, but I'd kind of like to know what to anticipate so I can be prepared. And that's why the disciples ask Jesus about His shocking statements.

The material in Mark 13 is very similar to Matthew 24-25, so I'll only point out some things along the way that you can add to the *Cruisin' Through The Bible* comments in Matthew.

Having been to Israel, one of the most lovely views is standing on the Mount of Olives' hillside east of Jerusalem and looking westward toward the Old City. I try to imagine where the Temple stood and how the Temple Mount was arranged. It's hard because there's a beautiful gold-domed building, a temple to a pagan god, Allah. Frankly, even though it's beautiful and the architecture is centuries old and fascinating, it's still a building dedicated to a pagan god standing in God's holy place – the Temple Mount – and possibly on the site of the 1st and 2nd Jewish Temples.

Still, the overall vision is inspiring because I know that one day, Messiah will return, clear the Temple Mount and construct a 3rd Temple to which all nations will stream to worship the One, True God (Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1). Islam's Dome of the Rock will be torn down or heavily renovated to remove all Islamic references.

Removing a faith's worship focal point is no small thing. The 1st and 2nd Temples represented the God of Israel, His people, the nation, and their future. For the disciples to hear of the Temple's prophesied destruction was shocking and about more than a building's demolition. Jesus' words brought up images of Assyria's and Babylon's attacks, the exiles, and the near extinction of the Jewish people. "But God, you promised that we Jews would be Your nation forever. You promised that David would have a descendant sitting on Israel's throne, a king who would unite all the tribes and whose government would rise above all the nations of the world. We know that king to be Your Messiah, the Son of David. Now Your Son, Jesus, says this is all coming down. This is too much. 'Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished.'"

And so, Jesus launches into His Olivet Discourse, His End Times seminar delivered to His disciples as they sat on the Mount of Olives looking west over Jerusalem.

Like Matthew's account, Jesus starts with the near-term events (13:5-8), continues with the interim times, then ends with the End and His return. In the near term, Jesus' disciples must watch out for fake deliverers who claim to be Israel's Messiah. This warning was

fulfilled in one instance by Shimon Bar Kochba (*Simon, the Son of the Star* – a messianic reference) in A.D. 135. Nope, he wasn't the Messiah, even though a famous rabbi of the day, Rabbi Akiva, hailed him as the One. Simon's efforts led to even further destruction of Jerusalem after the Romans raked the city about 65 years earlier, in A.D. 70.

Jesus warns them of wars and rumors of wars (no surprise, it's humanity's condition) and natural disasters. "Oh, but don't worry, guys. This is just the *start!* (like birth pangs, labor pains)." I bet the disciples were thinking, "Oh, joy! Oh, rapture!" And then there's the persecution coming their way from governments and family members. Whoopee!

Some readers see Mark 13:12-13 as still pertaining to the disciples, and it does to an extent. However, it ends with, "but the one who endures to the end will be saved." "The end" could apply to the current disciples' deaths, or "the end" could apply to what the disciples had asked about, "what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished." Matthew's text clarifies their question as referring to the End, i.e., "what is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

What follows is what Jesus says will happen at the end, just before His return. Like Matthew, Mark says the Temple Mount will be defiled by the Abomination that brings Desolation, and it will be similar to what Daniel prophesied. History verified that Daniel's prophecy was indeed about Antiochus IV Epiphanes' desecration of God's Temple in 167-165 B.C. (13:14). What Daniel prophesied, and Antiochus fulfilled, will also mark the start of the End Time Great Tribulation, also known as the Time of Jacob's Troubles (Jeremiah 30). It will be a global time of cataclysms, upheavals, and severe troubles unmatched in human history (13:19). The disasters will be so terrible that if God doesn't cut the time short, no human being will survive (13:20).

During that time, people will be clamoring for someone to save them, and many opportunists and megalomaniacs will step up to claim supreme savior status. Don't buy it. Others will say Jesus has returned and is a particular person or that Jesus has returned and is located here or there. Again, don't buy it (13:21-22).

For the Christians that believe they'll be Raptured off the earth before the Tribulation, this is for you from Jesus' lips. Read carefully. "But in those days, *after that tribulation...* then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (13:24-26). When Jesus comes, it's then that we'll be gathered to Him in the air, "He will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven" (13:27). We will meet Him in the air and follow in His entourage back to

the earth as He steps down on the Mount of Olives to claim Israel and the globe for His Father's kingdom.

Jesus tells the disciples that another sign that the End is near is the "fig tree" leafs out. This refers to the nation of Israel. When Jesus says this to His disciples, He knows national Israel will be torn down, just as the Temple will be. Matthew 23:38 and Luke 13:35 record the same thing. Jesus also knows His people will return as a nation at the end per the Prophets and His Father's promise. Therefore, when the fig tree (Israel) leafs out (returns as a nation), the time for the Son of Man approaches (13:28-29). And from what Jesus says, it sounds like the generation that sees Israel's reconstitution as a nation will see His return (13:30), and even though we may know the *season* of His return, we won't know what *day or hour* Jesus will appear. "And you must watch! I have told you everything in advance" (13:23).

Chapter 14 switches from the Mount of Olives seminar to the final events leading to Jesus' crucifixion. The leaders are looking for a cunning way to take Jesus out, but they don't want to attempt it during the Feast of Passover. With all the people in town (est. 1 million), messianic expectations high, and Roman tensions sky-high, a high-profile arrest could spell disaster (14:2).

Meanwhile, back in Bethany with Jesus and the disciples, a woman anoints Jesus with a costly perfume made from spikenard. "Spikenard had a strong, distinctive aroma, similar to an essential oil, that clings to skin and hair and continues to give off its heady perfume... The ointment prepared from the root was highly valued. Spikenard symbolized the very best in ancient cultures the way that 'Tiffany diamond' or the 'gold standard' does to us. Spikenard had a unique fragrance, and the presence of its aroma was an indication that the very best had been offered" (gotquestions.org/spikenard-in-the-Bible.html). This woman's act is one of unrestrained love and unselfish giving. Even though the disciples object, Jesus reveals that the woman's anointing carried a deeper meaning that no one knows or possibly comprehends – Jesus' death and burial. You could say the woman loved Jesus to death, and Jesus says her selfless act would be recorded for as long as the Bible exists. What a contrast to Judas, who at that time was scheming to betray Jesus (14:10).

As we read on, the Passover is prepared, and the feast begins. Jesus drops His bomb, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me" (14:18). Of course, since Mark just mentioned that Judas had gone to "the chief priests to betray Jesus" we know who the betrayer will be, but the other disciples didn't. They don't find out until Judas shows up in the Gethsemane Garden with the mob. Some Christians

discuss whether Judas was saved despite his betrayal. After all, he regretted what he had done and tried to make things right by returning the money to those holding Jesus. We can be sure he wasn't, by Jesus' own words, "woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for him if he had not been born" (14:21).

Jesus and His disciples complete their Passover celebration. Everyone retires to the Garden of Gethsemane (14:26). Then Jesus drops His second bomb, "All of you will fall away, because it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you to Galilee" (14:27-28). Who could have seen that coming? Answer: The disciples! Jesus told them at least three times what was going to happen. Remember? However, God masks His plans, and I believe He often does it, so we don't get in the way as Peter showed he would (8:33).

Jesus withdraws for undistracted prayer with His *Abba* (*Dad* in Hebrew. It's fun to walk through Jerusalem and watch little kids running after their fathers and calling, "Abba! Abba!"). Jesus is deeply grieved as He faces what He's about to endure, yet He finds His strength in His Abba's promise to bring His Son through a tortuous death to glorious life. Jesus is our model as He places Himself in His Abba's hands even as He's about to fall into human hands (14:41-42). When He returns to His disciples, Jesus finds them asleep for the third time. According to the Greek text, Jesus' "Enough!" cry is forceful, bordering on exasperation (per my Study Bible). It's time for them to get up and move out to face the coming betrayer and the mob head-on.

But that didn't mean defending Jesus with a sword. When Jesus waves His defender off and surrenders to the crowd, Jesus' "I will never desert You" disciples flee. One young man is almost taken into custody along with Jesus, but since the young man was using linen cloth as his wrap, he slipped out of it and ran away naked. For the record, many believe this young man is John Mark, the writer of this Gospel.

The rest of the chapter covers what Matthew covers – Jesus' trial and Peter's denial. Since no one brings reliable testimony against Jesus, the High Priest places Jesus under oath. He asks Jesus point blank, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One (a circumlocution for "God" lest Yehovah's name is misused)?" (14:61). Jesus says He is and that He is also the Son of Man from Daniel 7 (14:62).

This confession seals Jesus' condemnation by the leadership. His telling the truth contrasts with Peter hiding the truth by denying Jesus. Mighty Peter, the Rock, wilts under pressure from the High Priest's maidservant and some bystanders. I understand

Peter's fear because if the maidservant ID'd Peter, she would run to her master with the news. Peter might have found himself crucified alongside Jesus as an insurrectionist.

Let's pause for a side note: The many similarities between Mark and Matthew make scholars think that Mark was written first and the other Gospel writers used Mark as their primary source material. Some scholars say Matthew wrote his Gospel first, and a few say Matthew was initially written in Hebrew (see nehemiaswall.com/hebrew-gospel-matthew-nehemia-gordon). Regardless of who wrote first, the other Gospel writers added their perspectives. If you're interested in how the Gospels came to be written, check out gotquestions.org/which-gospel-written-first.html.

As dawn breaks, Jesus is hauled before Pilate. Pilate questions Jesus, but Israel's Messiah remains quiet. Abba's will be done.

Pilate offers the crowd something that he thinks will appease them and work to his advantage because he knows full well Jesus is an innocent man of whom the Jewish leadership was jealous; "Pilate answered them, "Do you want me to release the king of the Jews for you?" For he knew it was because of envy that the chief priests had handed him over" (15:9-10). But that didn't work so well. Not only did the leaders stir up the crowd to condemn Jesus, but Pilate's offer backfired, and he was forced to release a real insurrectionist who had committed murder. The result? A man who could give life received death, and the man who caused death received life. Excellent work, Pontius. But that was God's plan.

Pilate sees things are getting out of hand, so Pilate gives in and releases Jesus to be crucified. But first, the Roman governor has Jesus flogged. I know that the scriptures say this was required to fulfill prophecy, "But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and *we are healed by his wounds* (bruise, welt, wound, injury)" (Isaiah 53:5). Still, from a purely natural perspective, I see Pilate using the flogging to weaken Jesus before His crucifixion to speed up His demise. Dying on a Roman cross was not quick, and it was exposure that often killed the Roman victims and could take about 3+ days. A normally drawn-out death during crucifixion is why the Roman soldiers were surprised Jesus died so quickly. They didn't have to break His legs to speed up Jesus' death.

The soldiers mock Jesus, and they play "Messiah dress up" to humiliate and abuse Him (15:17-20). They finish their abuse, dress Jesus, and lead Him out to die. Along the way, the Romans exercise their right to press citizens into service. They choose Simon of Cyrene, Alexander and Rufus' father, to carry the cross beam. If you've ever seen Mel

Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, you can understand how agonizing Jesus' walk to His place of execution was.

When the squad reaches *Golgotha* (*Skull Place* in Aramaic), they offer Jesus a mild narcotic to dull His pain, but He refuses. The crucifixion commences with maximum pain and humiliation. Jesus is stripped naked, and the soldiers follow tradition by dividing up Jesus' clothes, His last earthly possessions. Among the people who pass by are those who follow the Jewish leadership's lead in mocking the would-be messiah. Again, given the mass amounts of people in Jerusalem, about a million, there are plenty of witnesses to Jesus' death.

Little did the leadership know that about 40 years after Jesus' death, the Roman army would show up on Jerusalem's doorstep during Passover to put down a rebellion. The siege ended almost three months later with the destruction of the people, the Temple, and Jerusalem. Ironically, many of those who used Roman hands to kill Jesus later died by Roman hands.

Jesus is crucified at 9 am. At noon, darkness comes over the land (15:33), which lasts until 3 pm when Jesus cries out, "Eloi, Eloi, lemá sabachtháni?" which is translated, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' (15:34). A few bystanders mistakenly believe Jesus the Would-Be Messiah is calling out for Elijah to save Him, because, as everyone knows, Elijah will herald the Messiah's coming. Someone runs to get a sponge soaked with wine vinegar, likely to sustain Jesus just a bit more until Elijah shows up. On the one hand, this seems to be merciful. On the other hand, it seems cruel to prolong a possibly deluded man's death just in case something extraordinary might happen.

But Jesus dies.

Sadly, the Roman centurion standing near the cross utters what the Jewish people should have spoken at that moment, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (15:39). This is the high point of Mark's Gospel. The centurion's exclamation is the first time anyone in the Gospel proclaims this about Jesus, and it echoes what Mark opens with in chapter 1, verse 1.

It's noteworthy that the women remain with Jesus until the end (15:40-41). If you've noticed, the women and angels are the ones who serve Jesus well. At this point, the men have fled.

Jesus dies on Preparation Day, i.e., preparation for the Sabbath, not Passover. That makes it 3 pm on Friday. As mentioned before, the Torah says an executed person must not be kept on display into the next day (sundown), “you are not to leave his corpse on the tree overnight but are to bury him that day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse” (Deuteronomy 21:23). Therefore, a member of the Sanhedrin boldly goes to Pilate to ask for Jesus’ body.

Joseph of Arimathea’s request astounds Pilate because crucifixions typically take much longer, and Jesus died so quickly. Pilate has to have the report checked out. When it does, Pilate releases Jesus’ body to Joseph (15:44-45). Just in case, security measures are taken to prevent Jesus’ disciples from stealing His body to perpetrate a hoax.

Seeing where Jesus’ body has been placed, “Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices (early Sunday morning) so that they could go and anoint him” (16:1). Why? They didn’t have enough time before the Sabbath began, so the earliest they could get to the body to prepare it for decomposition would have been at dawn on Sunday morning when they had light to prepare Jesus’ body for decay.

Surprise! The stone is rolled away, and an angelic welcome is awaiting them. The angel announces Jesus’ resurrection. How did the women react? “They went out and ran from the tomb because trembling and astonishment overwhelmed them. And they said nothing to anyone since they were afraid” (16:8). Yeah, I probably would have done the same thing.

16:8 is where Mark’s Gospel stops in the oldest and best manuscripts. Is this the end? Nope. Jesus’ resurrection is just the beginning of the end, an ending that looks to us like it had been planned to take about 2,000 years. Israel’s return and the other End Times signs appear in our day. Could we be the last generation that sees Jesus’ return?

Okay, what about the famous “last section” of Mark 16:9-20? Likely it was added post-Mark, but it contains information that streamlines with the other scriptures. Mary is described more fully as a woman “out of whom he had driven seven demons” (16:9). It’s wonderful that it’s to a woman that Jesus chooses first to reveal Himself. Mary gets to tell the disbelieving disciples about seeing Jesus.

Jesus appears to two others in a form they don’t recognize. This refers to the Road to Emmaus account we’ll read about in Luke 24. So, now we have a couple of testimonies, and still, the disciples disbelieve the eyewitnesses.

Jesus makes His grand appearance. He walks into a mealtime uninvited and promptly rebukes His disciples for their “unbelief and hardness of heart” (16:14). Later, Jesus commissions them to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” This isn’t a suggestion. The verb tense is in the imperative. *PREACH!* To whom? *ALL!* Okay, Jesus. Got it. “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (16:16). The *believes* and *baptized* speaks of inward acceptance and outward evidence. The two must go together per Jesus. But the risen Lord gives more outward evidence that will accompany the disciples and potentially all who follow Jesus. Those are casting out demons, speaking in tongues, protection from danger (snakes and poison), and healing through prayerfully laying on of hands (16:17). By whose authority and power can Jesus’ followers do this? Need you ask? Jesus’ authority and power, “*in My name.*” What happens? Jesus leaves, and the disciples launch out to “everywhere.” And like Matthew records, “the Lord worked with them,” and Jesus confirmed their testimony with signs, “a wonderful work, miraculous operation, miracle... that serves as a distinguishing mark” (Mounce’s Greek Dictionary).

INSIGHT

So, where are the miracles today? Why aren’t Jesus’ followers constantly praying for people and sharing their testimony about Jesus? I’ve seen healing miracles and even participated in a few in my lifetime, and I know beyond a doubt that Jesus is doing this through His followers today. However, just like Jesus did only a few works in Nazareth because they refused to believe, I think many in Jesus’ community don’t experience God’s authority and power moving through them because they refuse to believe it’s available to them *by Jesus’ command! C’mon, disciples. Let’s get with the program!*

October 25 : Scriptures Luke 1-3

SUMMARY

We now explore another Gospel from another perspective. Let's explore the 5 "Ws" of Luke's Gospel.

Who is Luke? Most of the evidence points to the physician, Luke, and that's drawn from the book of Acts, "I wrote the first narrative, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). When you read the book of Acts, notice that much of it is written about others. However, at a certain point, when Dr. Luke joins Apostle Paul's team, the narrative shifts to "we" and "us." Luke's Gospel is written in the "they/them" mode, which lines up with Dr. Luke's claim, "Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us" by talking to those who had been with Jesus and touched by His ministry. It appears Luke compiled many testimonies and assembled them into His Gospel. Then Luke proceeded like a journal.

Luke was likely a Gentile who had come to faith in Jesus. Gentiles who bonded with the Jewish community without converting were called *sebomenoi*, God-fearers (see note c at biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts.13.43&version=NET). We'll see a fine example of *sebomenoi* in Acts 10.

What did Dr. Luke write? Most scholars agree that Luke wrote a Gospel and his historical record, the Acts of the Apostles. Therefore, Luke's Gospel is part 1 of a 2-part set – Luke/Acts.

When did Luke produce his Gospel? There is evidence that Luke wrote his Gospel after Matthew and Mark, and his book of Acts was completed around A.D. 62-63. Therefore, Luke likely assembled his accounts in the decades leading up to that. My Study Bible suggests Luke did his work during one or both of Paul's imprisonments. We're not sure.

Where did Luke write His Gospel? Hither and yon.

Why did Luke write His Gospel? Because he wanted to research and present the truth about who Jesus was and what He did. According to my Study Bible, Luke's Gospel was "designed to strengthen the faith of believers (1:3-4) and to challenge the misconceptions of unbelievers, especially those from a Greek background. Its portrait of Jesus is well-balanced, skillfully emphasizing His divinity and perfect humanity."

One thing that's very touching about Luke's Gospel is how he compassionately notes many in the culture who would have been overlooked or sidelined – women, children, Gentiles, the sick, and the sinners. You can feel Luke's empathy as he writes about Jesus' outreach to those same people.

Like Matthew, Luke provides a childhood narrative that leads us into Jesus' ministry, followed by His Galilean ministry, His Judean ministry as Jesus moves toward Jerusalem, and finally, Jesus' Jerusalem ministry, where He dies and rises. That said, let's go *Cruisin' Through the Bible* with Luke.

Chapter 1 has an exciting start. Matthew begins his Gospel by tracking Jesus' birth and infancy. Mark crashes onto the Gospel scene with John the Baptist's revival and repentance services at the Jordan. Luke starts his Gospel with John's conception.

The conception and birth of Messiah's herald, the Messenger, was foretold to John's elderly parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, during the days of King Herod the Great (1:5). This places the events around 6-4 B.C. Zechariah was a Levite serving in the Temple, and Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron, the High Priest. According to God's affirmation via inspired scripture, these two lived exemplary righteous lives but had no children. Elizabeth's barrenness is sad since children were often a sign of God's approval. To be barren was thought of as cursed by God (2 Samuel 6:20-23). But the couple were obviously not cursed because their righteous lives bore testimony to their faithfulness.

The time came for Zechariah's division to serve in the Temple (1:5, 8). Here's some background: The Levitical priests served in shifts initially set up by King David (1 Chronicles 24:1-18). Their job descriptions included preparing and offering sacrifices, leading the music, guarding the Temple, preparing the sacrificial meals, cleaning and setting up for the day's sacrificial service, tending the Golden Menorah in the Holy Place, placing bread on the Table of Showbread, and burning incense in front of the Most Holy Place's curtain.

According to the Bible's calendar, the first course (shift) would start with the month of Aviv (late March-early April) and assist the High Priest in the Temple for one week. Then the 2nd course of priests would serve during the 2nd week. Since the Week of Unleavened Bread and Passover fall at the start of the 3rd week, all the priestly courses are to help with the immense crowds in Jerusalem during the Feast. Then, the regular pattern picks up on the 4th week with the 3rd course until the Feast of Shavuot, when all the priestly courses must serve again. Following that week, the regular order picks up and follows the

schedule. When the priestly families have “run their course,” the family lines begin again with course 1. If you were a priest, you would serve in the Temple 4-5 times yearly.

Why do I bring this up? Because if we can figure out when Zechariah served as the priest who offered the morning incense (of Abijah’s family course, the 8th one), we can estimate when his son, John, was conceived and born. Since Jesus was conceived six months after John, we can figure a close approximation of when Jesus was born. I’ll put that in the Insight below.

Back to Luke. Zechariah is burning the morning incense before the Lord (1:9). This happens just before the sacrificial day begins at 9 am. As I understand it, part of the incense service included a prayer to Yehovah to send Elijah the prophet because, per Malachi, “Elijah,” the Messenger, was to come to prepare the way for the Messenger of the covenant.

Lo, and behold, the angel Gabriel (man, that angel gets around!) appears to Zechariah and announces that “your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.” As if finally getting a son wasn’t enough (and by a miracle at that), Gabriel unloads even more surprising news: 1) John will never drink alcohol, meaning John will be a Nazirite (Numbers 6), a person who has been set apart to the Lord, 2) John will be filled with the Holy Spirit before he’s even born, and 3) *John will be Israel’s long-awaited “Elijah,” the one who will prepare the way for God’s Messiah and introduce Him to His people, the Jews.*

You’d think Zechariah would have to pick himself off the ground at that news. Nope. He stands there and wonders how the conception will happen because he and his wife are... old... now. What? Has he never heard of Abraham and Sarah? Dare he doubt God’s word through His special messenger angel? Yeah, that’s precisely what Gabriel says. (Now that I think about it, Yehovah sent His messenger angel to announce the messenger, John, who will announce the messenger of the covenant, Jesus. Pretty wild. weird.) Since Zechariah refuses to believe the angel, he won’t be able to tell anyone about the incredible news he’s heard until John is born. You can imagine how tough that would be for an impending new father.

Zechariah emerges from the Temple, unable to speak, although the people know something happened. He tries to communicate but to no avail. He goes home and *bada-bing*, Elizabeth becomes pregnant with the prophesied John. Now *that’s* a blessing from the Lord.

Six months later, Gabriel zooms to a town in Galilee named Nazareth to talk to a woman engaged to a man of King David's family line. His news to Mary is that God's favor is all over her. She gets to birth Israel's Messiah! She's to name Him Yeshua (Jesus, "salvation"). He'll be great and be the Son of the Most High. He will reign on His ancestor, David's, throne (1:30-33), but this Israelite king will be different from all the others – He will reign forever!

Mary asks how this can happen since she isn't married and is still a virgin. Now, you would think that her question might raise the same ire as Zechariah's doubting question. Not so, because in Israel's history, there's already a record of elderly people conceiving children by God's power. However, no virgin has ever done so. Therefore, Mary has a legitimate question which Gabriel answers and doesn't punish her for asking it.

"The Holy Spirit will create this child in you. Therefore, people will say that this child is truly God's Son" (1:35). And here's the kicker to Mary's faith. Gabriel tells her that her cousin, Elizabeth (the post-menopausal senior citizen), is already pregnant by God's help, proving that nothing is impossible with God, including birthing a baby from a virgin's womb. You have to give Mary credit. She accepts Gabriel's words and sets off to visit Elizabeth.

When the two women meet, the 3rd person of the Trinity (the Holy Spirit) within John *in utero* resonates with the 2nd person of the Trinity (the Son), who is taking on flesh *in utero*, and that causes pre-born John to jump with joy (1:44)! Elizabeth also gets a flash of spiritual revelation and knows that Mary's been blessed by God.

Mary's song praises God for His greatness (1:46) and is like Hannah's song after she also was enabled to conceive by God's power (1 Samuel 2:1-10). Mary understands that she doesn't deserve God's grace but receives it anyway and that future generations will admire her because she was chosen to bear Israel's Messiah. She praises God for His holiness and mercy and how He scatters the proud but exalts those who are humble before Him. He has fulfilled His promise to the people of Israel and their ancestor, Abraham (1:54-55, speaking of miraculous births). Mary stays with Elizabeth until John's birth and returns home around three months pregnant (1:56).

The big day arrives, and John the Immerser, the Elijah who is to come, is born (1:57). Everyone rejoices with the happy couple and how the Lord has shown them great mercy. The time comes for John to be circumcised on the 8th day per God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10, 12). Now, remember, John's dad, Zechariah, is still mute from his little interaction with Gabriel. According to custom, a newborn boy receives his name

when circumcised. The attending relatives and friends assume Zechariah and Elizabeth will name the boy after his father, but no. Elizabeth tells the guests their boy's name will be John (*Yochanan*) which is strange to them since children are usually named after relatives and "None of your relatives has that name" (Luke 1:61). It's funny, but they turn to mute Zechariah for the "last word" on it. Zechariah, out of obedience to God, writes that his son is to be named John, and immediately he can talk. And not just talk, but prophesy by the Holy Spirit's power!

Zechariah, the Holy Spirit-filled priest, speaks about his Holy Spirit-filled prophet son. John's birth as Jesus' forerunner is worthy to praise God about because the time of God's redemption has arrived (1:68), and He will begin to restore His people through His man who is David's successor, the horn of salvation (1:69) just as He promised He would. The Lord God has remembered His covenant with Abraham that his descendants would serve God without fear of their enemies and in "holiness and righteousness" (1:75). Then Zechariah prophesies over John. His boy will be God's prophet who will prepare the Lord's way of restoring His people by teaching them about how to be forgiven of their sins as the new way of the messianic age dawns (1:77-79).

John grows, and as he becomes more powerful in the Spirit, he moves to the wilderness to prepare for his repentance ministry.

Chapter 2 is one of the most well-known sections of scripture, even if you aren't a Christian. Besides reading it in my times with the Lord, I've probably heard Luke 2 hundreds of times from pulpits, plays, and television shows, especially at Christmas. But the surrounding material we don't read so much adds buckets of meaning to Jesus' birth. So, let's take a run at it.

Jesus' birth happens during a Roman census when the Romans count people for taxation and military service. This census probably occurred in the Fall. Because the economy was agricultural, an occupying nation wouldn't tax people while they were planting, tending, or harvesting crops, especially if it involved a trip to the original family stomping grounds. You want to catch farmers *after* their income has come in. Therefore, the census was likely after the Fall harvest. Because Joseph was of King David's family line, his census station was at Bethlehem, David's city (2:4).

Sadly, the expectant couple can't find room for two reasons; an obvious reason and one that's not so obvious. 1) The obvious reason: Everyone is returning to their family towns, so the local inns in Bethlehem are booked. 2) Not so obvious reason: Since this likely takes place right after the harvest and because of the pregnancy month count for Elizabeth and

Mary, Jesus was probably born during the Feast of Tabernacles sometime in late September/early October. If that's the case, then Bethlehem would *really* be crowded since the town is only 6 miles away from Jerusalem, where hundreds of thousands of Jews were headed for the mandatory 3rd annual Feast of Tabernacles pilgrimage (Deuteronomy 16:16). The out-of-town visitors needing lodging would spill over to nearby towns like Bethlehem.

So, Joseph and Mary had to settle for a place with animals, likely a stable or a cave used to house critters, evidenced by the feeding trough they used as a bassinet (2:7). Soon after Jesus' birth, Mary wraps her firstborn son in swaddling clothes to calm Him and keep Him warm (gotquestions.org/swaddling-clothes.html).

Enter the shepherds! What's this about shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flocks (2:8)? Bethlehem was an important place for raising and tending sheep for the Temple sacrifices because it had open grazing fields and the town was close to Jerusalem. The shepherds were awake at night to protect the sheep from predators. But instead of predators, the Angel of the Lord appears (perhaps Gabriel again) to announce Jesus' birth, the incarnation of God in human form. You can't fault the shepherds for being terrified. Most people in the Bible who see angels are frightened by their glorious presence, and they often faint (Daniel 10:7-9 for example). I'm sure that if the Lord's glory burst on the scene at night and glorious spiritual beings filled the sky, you and I would be dazzled, shocked, and panicked, too.

The Angel of the Lord's announcement also gives us a clue as to when Jesus' birth occurred. Remember when I pointed out that it makes sense to tax people just after harvest in an agricultural society? The Feast of Tabernacles is known as "the season of our joy" because Yehovah commanded His people to celebrate it with *great joy* (Deuteronomy 16:13-15). The Angel begins his announcement with, "I proclaim good news of great joy to you," which ties into one of the Tabernacles themes.

Also, Tabernacles celebrate Israel's 40-year wilderness wandering with the Lord, living in shelters/tents, *succot/sukkot* (*soo-coat'*) in Hebrew. The Feast of Tabernacles also celebrates the end of the Fall harvest. Since there's much to celebrate, Tabernacles is called The Season of our Joy. So it looks likely that Jesus was born during this Feast.

As a Jew would expect, the Angel tells them Israel's Messiah had been born in their most famous king's city, Bethlehem, and gives them a particular sign – the newborn is swaddled in linen cloth and using an animal food trough as a bed. That's a good sign for the shepherds because that takes various lodgings out of the search parameters and

includes places where livestock are sheltered. However, it does raise questions. How could such a lowly birth to humble parents benefit God's Messiah?

The shepherds find Joseph, Mary, and Jesus and relay the Angel's message, which leaves everyone amazed. However, for Mary, these words remained with her, and she probably repeated them thousands of times to herself and others throughout her life.

Eight days later, Jesus' Torah-observant parents have Jesus circumcised and named (2:21) just like John was. Then after the Torah-prescribed days of purification (a total of 40 days after a boy is born, Leviticus 12), Joseph and Mary bring their infant son to the Temple for His dedication to Israel's God (Exodus 13:2, 12) which includes two doves, the offering people are to bring if they were of low financial means (2:22-24). As they enter the Temple courts, they meet a man, Simeon, who is righteous as Zechariah and Elizabeth were. He was looking for the Lord's comfort for Israel, meaning the fulfillment of God's promised peace for His people, specifically through the coming King (Messiah). The Holy Spirit told Simeon he would see God's promise before he died. Imagine how exciting it would be to hear news like that! That's along the lines of the Holy Spirit telling you that you would live to see the Tribulation, the Antichrist, and Jesus' return! Here in Luke's Gospel, the Holy Spirit taps Simeon and lets him know, "Today's the day, my friend!"

It's fascinating to see how the Holy Spirit prompts, then guides the old man through the usual crowds in the Temple area directly to the young couple. Taking Jesus in his arms, Simeon cuts loose with joy. His words are wonderful and filled with scriptures.

Simeon isn't told Jesus' name that we know, so imagine how astounding his words about Jesus are. "Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace, as you promised. For my eyes have seen your salvation (*Y'shua/Yeshua*). You have prepared it (or *him*? Because in Hebrew, *it* and *he* are the same Hebrew word) in the presence of all peoples—a light for revelation to the Gentiles (Isaiah 9:1–2; Matthew 4:15-16) and glory to your people Israel." My Study Bible adds, "The worldwide scope of the gospel is Luke's ongoing theme in both of his writings (his Gospel and the book of Acts)."

After blessing God, Simeon blesses Jesus' parents and tells Mary that her son will be the downfall and rising of many in Israel (regarding salvation) and will be a sign from God that many of His people will oppose, sadly. He also hints that Mary will be hurt because of Jesus. All of this will reveal people's inward thoughts.

There's even more to Joseph and Mary's eventful day. First, an old man prophesies about their son. Now an old woman, Anna, comes up to the family and begins to speak about

Jesus to everyone longing for Israel's redemption (2:38). "Israel's redemption" means God will restore the nation, give them their king, and once again live among them.

Luke now jumps forward about twelve and a half years to another Feast of the Lord – Passover. Like the dutiful Torah-observant Jewish parents they were, Joseph and Mary have gone up to Jerusalem for Passover every year. This time it's no different (2:41-42). Only now, Jesus is on the cusp of His "coming of age." Joseph is still alive, but we have no idea how long it will be before he dies. By the time Jesus is an adult, Joseph is no longer in the picture.

The family celebrates, and Jesus' parents make their return home. However, after a day, they realize Jesus isn't with the entourage, so they take another day to rush back to Jerusalem to find their missing young man. Don't forget Passover is when Jerusalem's population swells immensely because of all the Jews and proselytes making their annual pilgrimage.

It took three days of searching for Joseph and Mary to find Jesus. That means the young man was on his own for five days. Jesus was evidently at the Temple every day, talking to the learned teachers who "were astounded at his understanding and his answers" (2:47). While it wasn't uncommon for a young man to have a grasp of the Torah, especially if he had a local rabbi as his teacher, the level of astonishment shown by the Temple teachers reveals how exceptional Jesus was at a relatively young age. I wonder if these men made a mental note of this up-and-comer, *Yeshua Ha Netzeret*, Jesus of Nazareth? After receiving a slight rebuke from His parents, Jesus returns home and is obedient to them, *just as the Torah commanded*.

Luke jumps again from Jesus' pre-teen years to the start of His ministry, and it begins with John the Baptist introducing Israel to her Messiah in chapter 3. The "15th year of Tiberius' reign" places the start of Jesus' ministry in the vicinity of A.D. 26-29. Pontius Pilate was Rome's governor over the province of Judea from A.D. 26-36.

Besides other leaders and their territories, Luke points out that John's immersion took place "during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas." Do you catch anything unusual about that observation? Right! There's only supposed to be *one* High Priest for life. Annas was Caiaphas' father-in-law. According to secular history and John's Gospel, the High Priesthood was passed from person to person annually or thereabouts, and priestly families openly vied for the position, often bribing Rome for the lucrative post. To give you an idea of how often the High Priesthood changed hands, here is the list of priests around Jesus' day:

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- *Ananus ben Seth, A.D.6-15*
 - *Ishmael ben Fabus (Phiabi), 15-16*
 - *Eleazar ben Ananus, 16-17*
 - *Simon ben Camithus, 17-18*
 - *Joseph ben Caiaphas, 18-36 (son-in-law of the high priest Ananus ben Seth)*
 - *Jonathan ben Ananus, 36-37*
 - *Theophilus ben Ananus, 37-41*

You'll notice that the High Priesthood remained in Annas' family through his sons, the most well-known being Caiaphas (Joseph ben Caiaphas). This buying of the High Priesthood violated the Torah and demonstrated the corruption that had consumed the Sadducean aristocratic families that were supposed to serve their holy God in a sacred and obedient manner. It was into this world that God released John, His prophet of repentance, to prepare His children for the new and only way to return to Him.

"God's word came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness" (3:2). The corruption in the heart of Jerusalem might explain why God had to call His people away from the city and into the wilderness to prepare themselves for His Messiah.

"Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight!... and everyone will see the salvation (*Yeshua*) of God" (3:4-6).

John's call wasn't for people to feel bad about their sins. Actions had to prove that a person honestly did want to change their life.

What should the crowds do to prepare? "Share with others."

What should the scorned tax collectors do to prepare? "Don't take advantage of people."

What should the Roman soldiers do to prepare? "Don't extort people by force or false accusations to pad your income."

John's message struck his hearers' hearts. It had been many years since a prophet of such conviction had been unleashed in Israel. With John's appearance, whispers of hope for Israel's Messiah began circulating. Maybe John was the Messiah (3:15)? Nope, says John. He knew who he was and for whom he was preparing the way. There would be a quantum difference between John and the coming Messiah. John preached repentance. The Coming One would bring judgment (3:16-17).

But not everyone liked what John had to say. Herod Antipas arrested John and threw him into prison. But first, John had to set the stage for Messiah's presentation. Jesus arrives, is baptized, is endued with power by the Holy Spirit, and announced to Israel by His Father.

Jesus began His ministry around 30 years old (3:23). We may think that's not a big deal, but it gives us a clue about His mission. All Levitical priests began their service at age 25 (Numbers 8:24). They were trained for five years. Then they started their ministry at age 30 (Numbers 4:3). What this tells me is that Jesus' first mission was not to serve as Israel's King but as Israel's Priest, their Highest Priest, and considering how corrupt the High Priesthood was, Israel needed a Holy High Priest for their forgiveness and cleansing.

As for the lengthy genealogy, Matthew traces Jesus' lineage back to Abraham, emphasizing His relationship to Israel and David's family line. Luke also shows Jesus' relationship with David's family line but traces Jesus back to Adam, highlighting Jesus' relationship with all humanity, not just the Jewish people. This illustrates Luke's theme – Jesus, a Savior for the Gentiles and the Jews.

INSIGHT

John identifies Jesus as the Word of God in His Gospel. We'll talk about that later when we get to John 1, but I want to show you something. John 1 says about Jesus, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The Greek word for "dwelt" is *skenoo*, "to pitch a tent, encamp; to tabernacle, dwell in a tent; to dwell, have one's abode" from the Greek word *skene*, "a tent" (Mounce Greek Dictionary).

Something we need to remember when it comes to the New Covenant scriptures, especially the Gospels, is that they have good Greek words, but at times they have lousy Greek syntax or sentence structure. However, the sentence structure shows good Hebrew syntax, suggesting the original text could have been written in Hebrew and then translated to Greek word-for-word. In other places, the words and syntax are good Greek, but the way the ideas are presented suggests the writer was thinking Hebraically, i.e., like a Jew. John 1:14 is one of those examples.

For John to say Jesus took on flesh and "tented" among us means little to a Gentile. To a Jew, this is loaded with meaning because God tented in the world when He lived in the Tabernacle, the Tent, with Israel in the wilderness. The Feast of Tabernacles/Tents commemorates God's immediate physical presence with His people.

How much more with Jesus, our God, who took on the “tent” of human flesh to live with us and prepare a way for us to live with Him forever! Could this also be a clue that Jesus was born during the Feast of Tabernacles/Tents when God chose to pitch a tent to live among His people forever? Does the indwelling Holy Spirit mean God has made us His tent to dwell in now? It’s mind-blowing, isn’t it?

So, what will it be like living with Jesus in the glorified flesh forever? Intense! (Get it? In tents? Thanks! I’ll see myself out.)

October 26 : Scriptures Luke 4-6

SUMMARY

Luke is the third of the three Synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Mark being the other two. Synoptic means “seeing together,” which describes how the three Gospels see the events of Jesus' life similarly, even though there are somewhat differing views of the order of the events and even what happened in each instance. It's like asking three witnesses to describe the same football game. Depending on their interests, perspectives, and biases, you'll get three similar but differing recollections.

As we move farther into Jesus' life and ministry, note that Luke has about 60% different material than Matthew and Mark, which I'll try to point out as we *Cruise* past. However, Luke's Gospel is like the other two in that he records Jesus' preparation for ministry, His Galilee work, His Judea ministry, and Jesus' final mission in Jerusalem. Per my Study Bible, much of Luke 1-2 is unique, as you've probably noticed, along with the different childhood accounts, John the Baptist's reply to those coming for baptism, and Jesus' genealogy. With that, let's follow Jesus out into the wilderness for the His temptation in chapter 4.

Luke's recollection of Jesus' temptation is the same as Matthew's but in a different order. Seeing as the nature of Satan's temptations has been preserved, I'll let you go back to the Matthew *Cruisin'* commentary for a refresher. However, there are a couple of things here to point out. First, the climax of Jesus' temptation ends at the pinnacle of the Temple, not on a high mountain to view the kingdoms and dominions of the world as the other two Gospels describe (4:9). Why is that? My Study Bible suggests that Luke's focus is Jesus' self-sacrifice in Jerusalem. Therefore, the final temptation is a clearer lure for Jesus to detour His Father's route to becoming Israel's Messiah. Again, each author has their purpose, perspective, and preference for what they've selected to include and in which order.

Second is Satan's statement, “I will give you their splendor and all this authority, because it has been given over to me, and I can give it to anyone I want” (4:6). Does Satan really have dominion over the earth? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that humanity, which carries God's mandate to exercise His dominion over the world (Genesis 1:28), has sworn allegiance to Satan via their rebellion against God. Satan “holds power” because fallen, pre-cross humanity is on the rebel side of the not-so-civil war. And no, Satan doesn't have dominion because a usurper to a throne claims the mandate to rule but doesn't. The Father's plan is a way to grant amnesty to His rebellious people while, at the same time, stripping Satan of *all* legal authority to lay claim to the earth. From the cross to Jesus'

return, the Father and His forces – God’s people and His heavenly army – will fight the battle against Satan until the Day of the Lord when Jesus returns to wipe out Satan’s forces and establish His Father’s kingdom on earth.

Satan’s mountaintop offer to Jesus is bogus. Again, even if Jesus paid homage (worship, allegiance) to the Usurper and received all dominion over the world with their authority and splendor, Jesus would still lose because Satan would not only retain dominion over the earth, but he will have stepped up to another level of authority *over part of the Godhead itself*. Pretty crafty. Thankfully, Jesus resisted!

After His temptation, Jesus returns to Galilee and begins His ministry in Nazareth, His boyhood home. It should be a grand launch to His ministry because so many people know Him, right? Wrong. Knowing a person as a developing child, teenager, and then as a young man develops a familiarity that gets in the way of accepting that person when they achieve great things. “Familiarity breeds contempt” and “Who does He think He is, the Almighty?” are the operative phrases here.

Jesus steps up to read during the service. In a synagogue service, then and now, it’s customary to read from the Torah and the Prophets and to do it while standing. In Jesus’ day, the rabbis/teachers then sit to preach or teach. Jesus takes the scroll of Isaiah and looks for a particular passage about a man who God anoints to carry out God’s commission. Jesus is Israel’s future king, and kings are anointed with oil to symbolize God’s Holy Spirit upon them to carry out their God-given assignment. Prophets and High Priests are also anointed with oil for the same reason.

The passage Jesus reads is about a Prophet’s anointing (4:18-19). Yes, Jesus came to be Israel’s King, but first, He will function as Israel’s long-awaited Prophet. Then at His crucifixion, Jesus will serve as Israel’s High Priest. Jesus will act as Israel’s King when He returns, bringing all three branches of God’s government into one qualified person.

Luke seems to note this event because, in it, Jesus declares His earthly mission. Furthermore, it’s a mission to the vulnerable and overlooked – the poor, captives, blind, and oppressed – a very Dr. Luke-ian focus. What’s exciting is what Jesus *didn’t* read from that portion. *He left out the last part of the verse, which reads, “and the day of our God’s vengeance; to comfort all who mourn.”* Jesus’ first time on earth was to extend God’s favor to all who would come to Him for salvation. God’s favor, mercy, and compassion are offered freely to anyone who would receive them. It will be on the Day of the Lord, when the Son of Man arrives, that the “day of our God’s vengeance” will happen. I believe this is why Jesus split the verse. As a mic drop, Jesus tells the Nazarene community in the

synagogue that Isaiah's prophecy has been fulfilled in their hearing. Jesus *IS* God's anointed one, their Messiah (4:21)

Hey, a successful ministry launch – at least for a few minutes. The people speak well of their hometown boy made good until they want Him to perform some miracles on command (as we know from the previous Gospels), something Jesus has just been tempted to do in the wilderness to prove His credentials to Satan. Jesus knows their request is more out of a sideshow curiosity than real spiritual hunger. Yeah, that's not gonna fly.

Furthermore, Jesus calls them out about what His fellow townspeople are thinking. "I know what you want – a few miracles. I did them in Capernaum, my adopted town, but you think you deserve some because 'I'm your hometown guy,' as if you have some claim on Me. Not happening. In fact, you'll reject Me *because* you're familiar with Me. For example, the Israelites knew Elijah, the Prophet, and the Israelites had many needs (famine and diseases). Still, God sent him elsewhere to minister rather than to his fellow Israelites and to *Gentiles* at that! No. I refuse because (implied) your hearts aren't in the right place, and they're just as hard and unbelieving as the Israelites of Elijah's day."

Well, that went well – not! Speaking the truth, especially about the hidden condition of someone's heart, is a prophet's specialty and never seems to earn the prophet accolades, just persecution. And that's what Jesus gets. The crowd flips on Him, takes Jesus to the highest ridge on the town's hill, and tries to throw Him down. Jesus just walks away through the crowd. How could He do that facing an angry mob? It could have been a miracle or awareness of His authority seeped out and gave the crowd pause allowing Jesus to walk away. Either way, it shows us Jesus is in complete control.

Speaking of control, Jesus returns to Capernaum (a bit more receptive than Nazareth at this point) and begins to teach in their synagogue (4:31). What do the congregation members notice about Jesus' teaching? He teaches with authority! Of course, Jesus should. 1) It's His Torah, and 2) Jesus is so perfectly Torah-observant He is the Walking, Living, Breathing Torah-In-The-Flesh. He is the living Word of God. God's word carries God's authority because its source is God Himself.

As Jesus teaches and His Father-given authority manifests, so does a demon who naturally reacts against the presence of God in the synagogue hall (4:33-34). What the demon says is fascinating, "Leave us alone! (Because God's presence torments demons.) What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? (They recognize who He is.) Have you come to destroy us? (They know their ultimate end according to God's plan. They

will all be destroyed one day.) I know who you are—the Holy One of God! (Demons know more about Jesus than most people do.)” When the demon comes out at Jesus’ command, the people are amazed, “he commands the unclean spirits with authority and power, and they come out!” (4:36). Sadly, the demons respond to Jesus’ authority more than the people do.

Chapter 4 closes out with Jesus healing many people and casting out demons. It’s encouraging to know that even Jesus needed some “alone time” to recharge, refresh in prayer, reflect, and perhaps take a nap. (4:42). When the people press Him to stay (Hey, guaranteed health care!), Jesus tells them His circle of ministry is much broader, with many other needs for healing and deliverance and hearing about God’s coming kingdom. Jesus is for all people, not just a few.

Matthew shows Jesus calling men to join as His disciples, just as a rabbi of His day would. In Luke chapter 5, Jesus uses the miraculous fish catch to illustrate what His disciples are meant to do. Luke alone recalls this account (5:1-11). Notice that Jesus, like the rabbi He is, sits down in the boat to teach (5:3). After His sermon, Jesus tells the guys to go fishing. Now that’s my kind of preacher! But there’s a spiritual point to the miraculous catch of fish event. On their own, the disciples won’t draw anyone to God. It’s impossible. It’s not like you can compel fish into a net or strategically cast a net over fish and make a big haul. But with Jesus directing the fish, there’ll be a massive haul. So, when it comes to evangelism and church growth, whose way do you want to follow? Something to think about.

The remainder of chapter 5 should be very familiar to you by now – most of the events we’ve covered in Matthew and Mark. However, try this. Knowing that Luke is a doctor and how his compassion flows through his Gospel recollections, look at the subjects he notes here – a man with a skin disease, a paralyzed sinner who is forgiven and healed, a despised tax collector whom Jesus calls to follow Him as a disciple, and a talk about a new cure (new patch) that’s incompatible with the old cure (old cloth) and how a person must be brought to health (new wineskin) before you can help them be healthy (with new wine).

Chapter 6 again has material we’ve seen before, but as we did at the end of chapter 5, try reading through it with Luke’s lens of compassion and mercy. In the Sabbath incidents, the Pharisees and scribes debate with Jesus regarding Sabbath restrictions. Jesus takes the compassionate side – human life and needs can trump Torah laws when necessary, and that’s okay with God. After Jesus affirms the “life and needs” principle to Torah commands and, by extension, nullifies the “Establishment’s” fences (created laws to

guard against Torah violations), the Establishment decides they have to deal with this problematic rabbi (6:11).

Jesus' ministry expands with the official selection of His primary disciples (6:12-16). By the way, have you ever thought about why Jesus chose twelve disciples and why the messianic community added another disciple to the leading group after Judas was dead to maintain the number at twelve? Tell me, how many sons did Jacob have? Twelve. How many tribes were there? Twelve. When God selected the tribe of Levi from the Israelites to serve Him, how was the number of tribes kept at twelve? Joseph's family split into two tribes – Ephraim and Manasseh. Could it be that Jesus was planting the seed of a new Israel, a spiritual Israel, not to take natural Israel's place, but as the Spirit-filled kingdom of God that Yehovah desires for natural Israel to become? Something more to ponder.

Luke again notes the many healings and demonic deliverances happening around Jesus, so much so that people were pushing forward to touch Jesus "because power was coming out from him and healing them all" (6:17-19). Jesus isn't just oozing power. It's streaming out of Him! Gee, like Living Water (water that moves, a reference to the Holy Spirit).

What follows is a condensed form of the Beatitudes from Matthew 5 and, with a counterpoint, the anti-Beatitudes. Beatitude means "supreme blessedness; exalted happiness" (dictionary.com/browse/beatitude), and it's the result of what God does for people who desire Him and need His help. They are blessed and exceedingly happy (6:21-23). The opposite is true for those who do not need God due to their wealth, full bellies, unaware of their spiritual bankruptcy, and the accolades people heap on them (6:24-26).

Furthermore, Jesus' followers should be loving people, even if it means loving their enemies. We should love those who hate, curse, and abuse us, even though wisdom says we don't have to stay with them when they do so. I've often counseled that people in abusive relationships should distance themselves from their abusers but still retain a loving attitude toward their "enemy," hoping they will find help and healing through Jesus.

Furthermore, Jesus' followers are to be generous and willing to give beyond what's asked of us. By loving people in these ways, God's love and life are highlighted, and people see God more clearly. God loved His enemies – us – and died to reconcile us to Himself (Romans 5:10), and He expects the same attitude and actions from us – forgiving and loving our enemies (6:32-34). The Royal Law/Golden Rule from Leviticus is paraphrased here – "Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them" (6:31). There is great reward in living this way, and it makes us more like our Creator (6:36).

The remainder of chapter 6 is the same as Matthew 7, just restated. There are some especially noteworthy verses to examine closely. I've often heard the verse, "Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over—will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you" (6:38) used during church fundraisers, offering appeals, and by televangelists. *Newsflash! This verse ain't about money!* Its context is judging or condemning others and forgiving them. 1) How we judge, condemn, or forgive others, God will treat us the same. Yes, it's a goad to get us to forgive others. 2) The amount we judge, condemn, or forgive others is the same measure you'll get. Again, it's a goad to prompt us to forgive others abundantly.

The following parable is about following the wrong person. The preceding parable refers to some who taught it was okay with God to hate your enemies ("You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy," as we read in Matthew 5:43). Jesus warns His disciples about who they follow because a disciple becomes like their teacher. If you follow the wrong teacher, you'll live wrong per God (6:39). If you follow Jesus, you're supposed to grow into a brighter and brighter reflection of Him (6:40). Simple. To deal with your enemy, make sure you're not doing the same thing, only worse (6:41-42), so you can help your "enemy" or the one you're trying to help effectively.

In the context of oneself or others, actions reveal who they really are. One may claim to be a friend, but their "enemy-like" actions may prove otherwise. Or, we can judge if someone is becoming more like God by their actions and our efforts to help them are paying off. Or, we can be bold and examine our lives. How do our words and actions reflect our trust in Jesus and our relationship with Him? As the phrase goes, "If we were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence in a court of law to convict us?" That might be a good exercise to think about for the rest of the day. Do we act like the disciples of Jesus we say we are?

The only way to become like Jesus is to follow what He teaches. Since He lives in us as believers, He should live through us as we follow what He taught and modeled for His disciples. If we don't follow what He teaches, we may be saved (because that comes by trusting in Him for salvation), but we certainly aren't His disciples. Disciples are supposed to speak and act like their rabbi. If we do, our lives will be more stable even when the storm rises. If not, then we're more likely to crash (6:46-49). We need to learn Jesus' teachings *and practice them!* That's the whole point of being a disciple.

INSIGHT

Little things in scripture can give great lessons. Check these verses out. "Then Jesus left

the Jordan, *full of the Holy Spirit*, and was *led by the Spirit* in the wilderness" (4:1). "Then Jesus returned to Galilee in the *power of the Spirit*, and news about him spread throughout the entire vicinity" (4:14).

Did you catch that? Full – led – empowered, all by the Holy Spirit. There's a pattern for Jesus' disciples. We're to be filled with the Holy Spirit, which we are when we're saved and the Holy Spirit takes up residence. We're to be led by the Holy Spirit, which sometimes means into situations where God allows us to be tested to reveal how we've grown (or lack thereof). Finally, we can't live a disciple's life without God's power helping us. It sounds like the catching fish event, doesn't it?

Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh today and lead you to love others by His power. Life takes on a whole new dimension when you do that!

October 27 : Scriptures Luke 7-8

SUMMARY

As we open chapter 7, we get another look into Dr. Luke's compassionate and world-embracing heart. The account of the Centurion's faith is similar to Matthew's in 8:5-13, and as we would expect, Luke has an interesting take on it. Here are the verses that stick out to me. "When the centurion (FYI, a commander of over 100 soldiers) heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, requesting him to come and save the life of his servant. When they reached Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, 'He is worthy for you to grant this *because he loves our nation and has built us a synagogue.*'" The synagogue the elders refer to could be the one in Capernaum we see today. Jesus would know about this centurion's support because Capernaum (Kfar-Nahum) was Jesus' headquarters. So, this sounds like it was likely a delegation from a nearby town.

The fact that the centurion did this for the Jews shows that he's a *sebomenoi*, a God-fearer, a Gentile who embraces the God of Israel without officially converting. Jesus agrees to help this man's servant in return. We never get to meet this centurion, but we learn he's a seasoned soldier who understands and respects authority. His trust in Jesus and His divine authority is remarkable. "Lord, you don't have to come to my home physically (possibly because of societal norms and how it might reflect poorly on an esteemed rabbi. Plus, he humbly recognizes Rabbi Jesus' position and that the Romans are "guests," though unwelcome guests). You wield great authority, and God isn't limited. Just say the word, and God will heal my servant." Amazing! Would that we all had such understanding and trust.

Next, we read about a widow from the town of Nain (about 6 miles south of Nazareth) whose only son died (7:11-17). Why would Luke highlight this? Because a widow's source of support would come from her children. Without a family to support her, a widow would be destitute. Talk about being vulnerable! She would have to rely on whatever help the community would give her. The widow's loss doesn't mean the Nain-ites wouldn't have helped her at all but keeping support in the family is a blessing for one's dignity.

Jesus spots the coffin, and no doubt recognizes the situation. He does the unthinkable – He touches the open casket. The box was likely just transportation for the body until the funeral procession reached the burial place. The burial team would place the body in a small, rock-cut space and roll a rock over the opening to keep out scavengers. Then the dry weather would help with bodily decomposition.

But approaching an open casket would be risky because touching a corpse would render a person more than unclean. Corpse contamination required an extensive purification process (Numbers 19:11). If the only place this cleansing could occur were at the Temple with a priest's help, this would require a long trip or a long time before corpse contamination could be lifted. Still, *out of compassion*, the holy and pure Jesus approaches the box bearing the body, touches it to make it stop, and speaks to the corpse, commanding the boy to live again – which he does! This event is the first time Jesus raises someone from the dead. A person who raises someone from the dead carries God's authority and power and should be listened to (Prophet Elisha, 2 Kings 4). How much more when the person raises many people from the dead? The community's reaction is as expected, "A great prophet has risen among us," and "God has visited his people" (7:16).

Following this great miracle, Luke recounts the event where John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He truly is God's Messiah or if they should wait for someone else. See? Even those who are closest to God sometimes have doubts. Be encouraged.

Jesus' response is to do "God's works" that a Jew would expect to see when God's kingdom does arrive, as spoken by the prophets (see Isaiah 35, esp. 5-6). Satisfied that Jesus is the Messiah, John's disciples leave to report back to him. Meanwhile, after Jesus affirms Himself, He affirms John as God's messenger and the greatest of all the prophets. Don't gloss over 7:29-30! John's mission was to prepare people for Messiah's coming and the new way of God's kingdom. It worked. "And when all the people, including the tax collectors, heard this, they acknowledged God's way of righteousness because they had been baptized with John's baptism. But since the Pharisees and experts in the law had not been baptized by him, they rejected the plan of God for themselves." Whether or not people received Jesus showed if they accepted God's new way.

Jesus characterizes the resistant leaders as children who are impossible to please. "I play a joyful song of the kingdom, and you leaders refuse to jump in and dance. John played a lament about repentance, and you leaders refused to cry over your sin and change your ways" (7:32-35). There's just no pleasing some people.

The last part of chapter 7 is all Luke and only Luke. A Pharisee, Simon, invites Jesus over for a bit of lunch. Perhaps Simon wanted to hear more of Jesus' teaching or wanted to honor the increasingly famous rabbi. As Jesus and Simon are reclining at the table (a person rests on one side perpendicular to the table), a woman who was a known sinner in town enters quietly and begins to wet Jesus' feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, kissing His feet and head and anointing Jesus with some very fragrant, and

undoubtedly expensive perfume. While this is happening, the embarrassed Simon thinks, "A prophet? Right. A real prophet would know what kind of defiled woman is touching him. Sheesh."

Suddenly, Jesus turns to Simon and tells him a story about a debtor. Jesus' point is simple. Those who are forgiven much appreciate it much, and those who are forgiven less appreciate it less. A person's reaction shows their level of self-awareness.

Then Jesus pulls the scene together. He points to the woman and tells Simon, "See her? Her extravagant outpouring of love and affection shows that she's not only profoundly aware of her sin but that God, whom I represent, forgives her of that sin, and she deeply appreciates it. On the other hand, you have done nothing but serve Me lunch (which Jesus probably appreciated anyway, for what it's worth). It's the level of extravagance that makes the difference, and here's Jesus' humbling comparison:

Simon gave no water for Jesus to wash His feet (washing feet was a common courtesy). How much more should Simon have done so for an esteemed guest like Jesus? But the woman washed Jesus' feet with her tears (to care for someone's dirty feet was a demeaning job for lowly servants) and dried them with her glory, her hair. She used her "best" for the most demeaning service.

Simon didn't greet Jesus with the customary kiss on the face. But the woman never stopped kissing Jesus' feet (again, a humbling, demeaning act).

Simon didn't give Jesus the great courtesy and comfort of anointing His hair with ordinary olive oil to freshen up. But the woman poured her pricey anointing perfume on Jesus' feet.

Simon should have done all these things, but he didn't. The woman did all these things that she didn't have to and in an abased way. Why?

Simon wasn't aware of his sinful state in the presence of a holy God. The woman was immensely self-aware of her sin before God. Jesus extends His Father's forgiveness to the woman who lavishly demonstrated her repentance. It was her faith in Jesus, her belief that He indeed was Who He said He was, that opened the door for God's grace. And Jesus' authority to forgive sins is again highlighted.

Recall Luke's focus on the marginalized people in the last chapter, the centurion, the widow, the imprisoned prophet, and the woman sinner. In chapter 8, we meet the women

who dedicated themselves to supporting Jesus, a long-time demonized man from a Gentile region, the woman with the unstoppable blood flow, and the dead girl. In between, Jesus teaches about being receptive to Him (the Parable of the Sower/Soils), how we should use the spiritual revelation we're given, how our relationship with Jesus should be our priority even over our closest family, and Jesus' authority over nature.

Let's give a shout-out to the women who supported Jesus: "Mary, called Magdalene (seven demons had come out of her); Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; Susanna; and many others who were supporting them from their possessions" (8:2-3).

For the Parable of the Sower/Soils, check out the *Cruisin' Through the Bible* for Matthew 13 on October 13.

Jesus' teaching about using our light is more than just letting people see God's revelation through our lives. Like the Parable of the Soils, 8:18 teaches us how we respond to what God reveals to us affects how much more revelation of His word He gives us.

Luke's account of the demonized man from the region of the Gerasenes (on the east shore of the Sea of Galilee) has a few more details than the other accounts. The man didn't wear clothes, preferred to live in a cemetery, and was supernaturally strong. Not only is the man delivered from the legion of demons within him, but when the people arrive, they find him "in his right mind." While not all mental illness is caused by demons, the Bible says we must leave that as a possibility. The same is true about diseases. Proper diagnosis regarding a demonic source requires clear Holy Spirit discernment. Here's a tip: if a person strongly or unreasonably reacts against anything of God, that indicates that demonization is worth considering.

Finally, we come to the woman who continued to bleed after her monthly cycle was supposed to have stopped. Due to her persistent blood flow, the woman has been in a ritually unclean state for 12 years. Again, I refer you to Matthew 9:20-22 (*Cruisin'*, October 11). One thing Luke includes is something a doctor would appreciate. "A woman suffering from bleeding for twelve years, *who had spent all she had on doctors and yet could not be healed by any*" (8:43). A dedicated doctor would want to know why the blood flow hadn't stopped. In this case, it could have been allowed by God so that she could be healed by touching the edge of Jesus' robe where the "sun of righteousness" has "healing in its/his wings" (Malachi 4:2). Or it could have just been a problem that still brought glory to Jesus' Father when God's power healed her.

INSIGHT

"Use it or lose it." As I write this, my dad is 90 years old and can shoot his age playing 18 holes of golf. Although he's slowing down, he tells me his diminishing abilities are nothing like his much younger friends pushing walkers or confined to wheelchairs. Yes, genetics, accidents, and life happen to us that affect our bodies, and maintaining the quality of life demands regular activity. As we age, we don't have to try to leap tall buildings with a single bound to prove ourselves. Heck, sometimes I can't leap a small dog in a single bound. But just moving around does wonders for us, and from experience, I highly encourage it.

The same goes for our spiritual lives. Prayer, worship, Bible study (hear, read, study, memorize, and meditate), and serving are all spiritual "muscles" we need to exercise to help maintain our spiritual health. I can testify (and this *Cruisin' Through the Bible* is proof) that the more I study the Bible, the more mental connections I can make between verses which often bring me more insights I can apply daily. I remember when I was younger and didn't read the Bible very much, and I found myself forgetting where a verse was found in the Bible and what the verse said word for word. I fell to paraphrasing and then to the old, "Give me your Bible and let me look it up." Sad.

Jesus is right, "Therefore take care how you listen. For whoever has, more will be given to him; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken away from him." (8:18). Use it or lose it, friend.

October 28 : Scriptures Luke 9-11

SUMMARY

I had to laugh. As I was refreshing the background of Luke's Gospel, my Study Bible said that section 9:51-19:44 is Luke's "travelogue" of Jesus' trip to Jerusalem. Yup that sums it up.

As we open our Bibles to Luke 9-11, we gasp. There's a lot of stuff here! We'll be reading *all day*. Especially if that long-winded *Cruisin' Through the Bible* guy drones on. No worries, faithful friend. Even though Luke packs much into three chapters, a large part is material I've already commented on. I'll hit highlights of exciting things that are specifically from Luke's perspective. So, grab a cuppa joe, and let's dive in.

The chapter begins with Jesus sending out the Twelve on a mission. This event foreshadows Jesus sending His disciples out with the Great Commission at the end of His earthly ministry. It's a training session. "Go preach about the coming kingdom and do kingdom works (healing and driving out demons) to back up your preaching. You know, practice what you preach."

The Father has granted Jesus authority and power for His work, so Jesus delegates the same to His disciples. It's like a sheriff deputizing the locals against the rowdy gang that's taken control of an old west town. I bet that in your mind's eye, you're seeing the disciples swaggering into town with robes, holsters, and fancy cowboy hats, huh? What? Is it just me? Uh, never mind. Moving on.

As Matthew notes, the disciples are to rely on God's provision through the hospitality of strangers. Just go and preach and do the stuff (9:3-4). It's not just a test for the disciples' trust in God, but an offer of hospitality proves someone is open to receive you and hence, your message. It also might show the person offering hospitality knows about Jesus and wants to host His representative. But if hospitality is refused, it's likely *because* the disciples represent Jesus. The welcoming person isn't rejecting the disciples. They're rejecting Jesus. So, what should the disciples do? Shake the dust off their feet as they leave, as in, "I won't even take the dust from this town with me as I leave." And off goes the team!

Jesus' reputation spreads. Herod the tetrarch (Antipas) wants to see this powerful and influential rabbi (9:7-9). Why? Probably curiosity. He wasn't sure if this were someone new or John the Baptist raised from the dead. Regardless, the word is out, and his suspicions are rising.

When the disciples return, they tell Jesus about what happened. The J-team go to Bethsaida for a debriefing. But the crowds follow (and can you blame them?). What does Jesus do? Preach and heal, just like He had sent His disciples out to do (9:11). See? The students are becoming like their teacher/trainer. According to Luke, we learn that feeding the 5,000 follows this training mission. Matthew places the massive picnic later in his Gospel. See what I mean about differing recollections? So, does this take away from the actual events? Not to me. Sometimes, a Gospel writer rearranged accounts to make a point. This “loosey-goosey” approach to details drives Western-style thinkers crazy because their thinking is linear and chronological. Hebraic thinkers think in blocks of events without bowing to strict timelines.

Peter’s confession follows. According to Matthew and Mark, this location is at Caesarea Philippi at the base of Mount Hermon. Luke doesn’t mention the place, but the events are the same. Jesus asks His disciples who the crowds say He is, and the guys respond with the general assessment – Elijah or John the Baptist returned to life. Remember, these men are referred to as the Messiah’s heralds. The Messenger of the covenant will be announced by the Messenger (Malachi 3:1). Either Elijah has returned to earth, or someone has appeared who has been cut from the same prophetic cloth (John the Baptist).

After hearing their answers, Jesus asks *them* who they think He is (9:20). Peter blurts out, “You are the Messiah of God,” which can also be translated as “You, Messiah, God” (*Atah Meshiach El*). According to the other Synoptic Gospels, Jesus affirms what Peter declares but then reveals something that breaks the conventional wisdom about Messiah and how things will play out. The leadership will reject the Son of Man (Jesus) and kill Him, but He will live again on the third day. Compared to the conventional wisdom about Messiah, that’s messed up. This revelation is Jesus’ first death prediction.

Luke logically follows Jesus’ announcement about His future execution with His talk about “cross-training” (9:23-27). Just as Jesus denies Himself and His life to do God’s work, so His followers (yes, that includes us all) are expected to do the same. It truly is a matter of life or death. Save your life now and lose it later or surrender your life to God for Him to use as He wills and gain it later in His kingdom. And speaking of God’s kingdom, some who are standing with Jesus at that moment will soon get a taste of it.

Luke’s Transfiguration doesn’t identify the two men talking with Jesus (9:30). The other two Gospels reveal they are Moses and Elijah. Yes, the real guys. Peter blurts out about making three temporary structures for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, which is ridiculous because Jesus’ mission was to turn toward Jerusalem for His crucifixion immediately. There would be no delay or camping out with the heavyweights on the mountaintop.

Even though the experience was stunning, the guys obeyed Jesus and said nothing about it until after Jesus rose from the dead (Mark 9:9).

Luke's demon episode (9:37-43) is the same as Matthew's, just shorter. That's followed by Jesus' 2nd death prediction, where Jesus reveals that someone's betrayal will lead to His death. Note that the disciples didn't understand this because God kept their thinking about it in the dark. Why? Likely because people's passions and plans often collide with God's. Face it. There are probably many things in our lives the Lord keeps hidden from us for the same reason. When it's safe to reveal the truth, the Lord helps us understand what happened. Imagine what it will be like when we get to heaven, and Jesus opens our eyes and minds to the life we lived and how He guided us. I bet it'll be amazing and incredibly humbling.

You have to admit, the J-team's northern trip was certainly a heady affair. Coming to know Jesus as Israel's genuine Messiah, a quick view of Jesus' divinity and the heavenly realm with Moses and Elijah (for the Three), and a mighty deliverance – perhaps the guys are starting to “feel their oats” as Messiah's entourage. Peter, James, and John are certainly positioned for the top cabinet posts. And then the discussion about who is more important breaks out. What does Jesus have to say about this? Greatness is determined by our willingness to be humble and not push for status, power, fame, or glory (9:46-48). The antidote to pride is humility.

The next event is unusual. John reports that they tried to stop someone from casting out a demon in Jesus' name, i.e., using Jesus' authority without being “on the team.” The guy in question was likely a disciple of Jesus but was not of the inner circle or traveling with the group. We find out later that Jesus sent out 72 disciples on a similar mission in which the 12 participated. My Study Bible has insight into this. “The spiritual principle here is to be careful about judging because certain people who are not against you may be on your side. The opposite point is made in 11:23” (Study Bible).

Speaking of opposing Jesus, we come to a unique recollection of Luke. Jesus has begun His journey up to Jerusalem for His crucifixion. The area of Samaria lay between Galilee and Judea. If you recall your Bible history, the Assyrians deported many Israelites from the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. and imported Gentiles to “de-nationalize” the land so there wouldn't be resistance to the new Assyrian authority in town. The result was a region where Israelites and Gentiles intermarried. Also, for many years the Israelites had been steeped in idolatry. The incoming Gentiles contributed to it, but when animals began attacking them, the immigrants asked the Assyrians to send priests of the local god (Yehovah) to teach them what to do to quell His wrath (2 Kings 17:24-31).

But what resulted was a syncretized Jewish/Gentile religion of the Samaritans. Check this out “They are still observing the former practices to this day. None of them fear the Lord or observe the statutes and ordinances, the law and commandments that the Lord had commanded the descendants of Jacob, whom he had given the name Israel... However, these nations would not listen but continued observing their former practices. They feared the Lord but also served their idols. Still today, their children and grandchildren continue doing as their ancestors did” (2 Kings 17:34, 40-41).

Therefore, the Samaritans were not only looked upon and despised as “half-breeds,” but their brand of “Judaism” was tainted and wrong even though the Samaritans claimed the same roots as the Jews. That’s why accounts involving Samaritans carry a special significance and should be noted.

As the J-team wind their way toward Jerusalem, Jesus sends emissaries to the Samaritans for accommodations. As soon as the Samaritans realize the team is Jews on their way to Jerusalem, they refuse to welcome the travelers. What was Jesus’ advice from before? “Shake the dust off your feet,” and move on. But that’s not good enough for John’s offended sensibilities. Nope. “Let’s smite them with fire, Lord!” That suggestion earned John a fiery rebuke from Jesus (9:56).

Finally, Luke relates what Jesus taught about the cost of following Him and the excuses people make. What it boils down to here are three things. 1) To follow Jesus, you must be willing to release anything that would “normally provide physical and emotional support” (9: 58, Study Bible). 2) To follow Jesus, you must decide now and not put it off until later (9:60). True, it is a son’s responsibility to bury his dad. But had the father just died, the son would be making funeral arrangements. In essence, the son is stating his intention to follow Jesus, but he wants to put it off until his life is clear of his regular responsibilities. Like that’s ever going to happen. 3) To follow Jesus means prioritizing Him above all else in your life, even if it means family ties. It’s impossible to work a plow in a straight line when you’re looking backward. No one can successfully drive a car looking in the rear-view mirror. Focus straight ahead on Jesus, or don’t get behind the steering wheel (9:62).

As chapter 10 starts, Jesus expands His announcement team to 72, 36 pairs of disciples. Some versions speak of 70 disciples per other manuscripts. He commissions the 72 the same as He did with the Twelve. Speaking of unreceptive people (10:10-12), Jesus has harsh words for those towns that had refused to welcome Him, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and sadly, Capernaum. Apparently, even though Jesus made Capernaum His hometown,

there was significant resistance to Him and His message. These three towns had their chance, and now Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem.

The 72 return with astounding reports! Even demons are subject to them in Jesus' name. Jesus affirms them with, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like lightning" (10:18). In other words, I saw him suffer further defeat quickly," echoing Ezekiel 28:16-17 where the king of Tyre is seen as a reflection of Satan, "*So I threw you down to the ground; I made you a spectacle before kings.*"

So, does that mean Satan is wholly defeated at this point? No. Jesus says He saw how they inflicted defeat on Satan and His kingdom through God's kingdom authority and power. Earlier, when Satan rebelled, God threw Him out of heaven (Revelation 12:9). On earth, as the Prince of the Power of the Air, Satan exercises influence over the kingdoms of this world through rebel humanity. Satan and His kingdom *always* suffer defeat when his and God's kingdom clash. Satan and his kingdom have been judged at the cross and are scheduled for imprisonment when Jesus returns and execution after Jesus' 1,000-year reign. Until then, Satan still tries to usurp God's kingdom and exercise his rule through unsaved people and ungodly governments.

But that's not what Jesus wants His disciples to focus on. They're to focus on their salvation, not Satan's judgment or the authority and power Jesus gave them to use. As remarkable as that is, their most wondrous awe should come from knowing that their names are written in heaven.

At the news of the 72's success, Jesus cuts loose in praise. Those who rejected Jesus are called the "wise and learned" who think they know the way of God's kingdom. But there are those who are like trusting children who freely accept Jesus' words through His disciples. The growing favorable response to Jesus was proof that His Father was opening eyes to the reality of the kingdom, which includes who Jesus and the Father are. The way to get this understanding is for Jesus to reveal it to you.

Furthermore, Jesus is excited for His disciples. So many godly people over centuries have longed to see God's kingdom in action like this, and now the disciples live it (10:23-24).

Remember those despised Samaritans? Guess who Jesus makes as the heroes of His following parable. Luke records this teaching so that we learn the lesson that being in God's kingdom (inheriting eternal life) is not about bloodline but proving you are God's person by being like Him – merciful and compassionate.

A scribe asks Jesus a legitimate question as a test which isn't unusual. The theologians of the day often asked each other questions to plumb the depth of a person's knowledge of God's word or their wisdom in applying it. Asking questions is a way to determine if a rabbi is faithful to God's word or not, whether the rabbi will "destroy/abolish" (misinterpret or misapply) God's word or "fulfill it" (interpret and apply it rightly). As for the leaders asking Jesus questions, sometimes the test question was disingenuous, and other times it was honest.

When Jesus came, His teaching was about how to find eternal life in the new way of God's kingdom. He was introducing. The previous way (Sinai/Moses covenant) was through bloodline, followed by faithful adherence to the Torah. The new way into God's kingdom will be through trusting the Father that Jesus' sacrifice atones for sin that had excommunicated humanity from God. Under the New Covenant's forgiveness and cleansing, anyone can live in God's kingdom with their lives guided by the same Law and led by the Holy Spirit.

So, a teacher of the law (a scribe) wants to test Jesus about this. "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (10:25) and Jesus answers his question with a "teacher of the Law" scribe-type question. "What does the Law say?" "The way to eternal life is loving God and loving one's neighbor," says the scribe. Jesus affirms the man's answer as His answer. But now comes the application part. It's a follow-up question because some neighbors are easier to love than others. "Who is my neighbor?" (10:29). In other words, "Is my neighbor only those I like?"

Jesus' point? *Any human being.*

The road from Jericho to Jerusalem is about 17 miles long. It winds through lonely canyons and hills as it rises from the Jordan River valley until it crests the Mount of Olives and drops toward Jerusalem. In Jesus' day, it was a hazardous road because of bandits.

In the parable, a man is attacked and left for dead. The priest and the Levite both avoids the man. Two possible reasons are 1) they didn't know if the man was dead, and if they touched a dead body, they would have to undergo extensive corpse contamination decontamination. 2) Or was it a trap? Perhaps the man was only faking it so the bandits could catch the travelers off guard. Therefore, the priest and the Levite avoided the man, leaving him to die.

But the Samaritan, whom Jews despise (a person who doesn't practice the true faith relative to God per the Jews), takes the chance and compassionately helps the injured

Jew. Through this comparison, the Samaritan's compassion vs. the previous two's neglect would have deeply humiliated Jesus' Jewish hearers because they knew they would have probably ignored the Samaritan. Again, Jesus' point is that it's not the person who says they're a good neighbor, but the one who proves they are by doing good as Israel's God would! Doing so fulfills God's Torah about loving one's neighbor, and *it means doing loving things for anyone*.

Jesus moves on to Bethany, a town just east of the Mount of Olives' summit, about two miles from Jerusalem. He stays at the home of some of His dearest friends – Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. They all follow Jesus. Martha acts as a worker bee. Mary acts as a disciple would by sitting at her rabbi's feet and listening to Him teach (10:39). This is a case of priorities again, according to Jesus. What's more important, serving lunch or listening and learning? Jesus isn't disparaging hospitality but teaches that focusing on Him is priority #1.

Chapter 11 jumps to Jesus praying. Something in the way Jesus prayed drew His disciples' attention. Jesus gives them the basic pattern: 1) May my life honor Your name, God. 2) May I live as I should in your kingdom, and may it come to earth. 3) Please provide what we need for today. 4) Forgive me in the way I forgive others. 5) Protect me from temptation. (Check out my commentary on Matthew 6:9-13, October 10, for more.)

Speaking of prayer and hospitality, Luke includes one of Jesus' *faith-building* parables here. To understand it, you must realize that hospitality was a huge expectation in the 1st c. Jewish community. To refuse to offer hospitality is an excellent way to earn a bad reputation among everyone in your neighborhood. Hospitality is so important that if you couldn't provide hospitality, your neighbor was expected to pitch in to help you offer hospitality. If your neighbor refuses when you ask, that would be a rotten thing to do and a smear on that neighbor's reputation.

So here's Jesus' point. Why should we keep asking God for His help? Because He *promised* to help us. To deny our request for help would be as bad for His reputation as the person who refuses to help *his neighbor* show hospitality to another person. See the connection to the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:30-37)? Therefore, trust God! He says to ask, then ask. In fact, the verb tense in this section reads, "keep on asking, seeking, and knocking until you receive an answer from your Father in heaven!" (11:9-10).

Mathew's take on this focuses on helping a person who needs correction, as in "Keep asking God to help you help that person." However, Luke's use of this parable concerns our and others' needs. No father who loves his child would be so mean as to do an evil

bait and switch when his child asks for a good thing. Our Heavenly Father will certainly hear and answer us, giving us good gifts, especially the best gift, the Holy Spirit (11:13).

Speaking of spirits, the next episode finds Jesus driving out evil spirits with His Father's authority and the Holy Spirit's power. The clueless ones (Pharisees per Matthew) say Jesus is driving out demons by Satan's power, not God's. Why is that bad to say? Because God's power is obviously operating, they're foolishly attributing God's activity to Satan's work. That's blasphemy (Greek, "speaking injuriously of"). Jesus tells them their assessment is ridiculous because no kingdom would fight against itself. A kingdom fights to win, not fight to destroy itself. Therefore, activity against demons automatically implies God's authority and power are operating. In this case, those who aren't with Jesus are against Him, explicitly referring to those who raised the "by the power of Satan accusation" (11:23). Furthermore, Jesus issues a warning. A person may be cleansed of a demon, but if something else doesn't take up residence (i.e., God, the Holy Spirit), then the person is wide open for re-demonization, and their final state will become worse than the first.

Let's drive on. Wait! (*brakes slamming*) Is Jesus rejecting His family in 11:27-28? No way! He's just saying that those who "hear the word of God and keep it" are the most blessed.

The Jonah Sign. As said before, Jesus *is* the Jonah sign. 1) Like Jonah, God sent Jesus to preach repentance to the people because judgment is on the way if they don't turn to God. 2) Like Jonah was "out of sight" for three days, Jesus will be, too.

Next, we are the lamp, and God's revelation in us and through us is the light. We're not to hide God's revelation but shine it out to everyone through our actions. The "good eye-bad eye" illustration is the generosity vs. stinginess idiom. One way we show God to the world is by being as lovingly generous as He is.

Finally, Jesus calls out the spiritual leaders for their hypocrisy! To avoid repetition, I'll refer you to the Matthew commentary (October 17) for more details. However, Jesus knows His rebuke will raise their ire, and so it does. "When he left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to oppose him fiercely and to cross-examine him about many things; they were lying in wait for him to trap him in something he said" (11:53-54).

INSIGHT

Think for a moment what Jesus taught about His Father answering our prayers (11:8-13). Because our Father promised to meet all our needs, which Jesus affirms (Matthew 6:31-

33), our Heavenly Father risks tarnishing His reputation by failing to answer us. So be encouraged! Keep asking. Trust God will do it. The struggle is not with Him but our expectation of when and how He will answer. If we're willing to hold those two things lightly and focus on trusting Him to answer, that's our strength when we battle ourselves and our doubts. Keep on keeping on.