

# The Gospels in Chronological Order

## John 1:1-5

The gospel of John does not include the author's name. He refers to himself a few times as "the disciple Jesus loved" (John 13:23, 21:20, for example). He was among the 7 in the fishing boat in John 21:2/7, one of the sons of Zebedee, and must have been the unnamed 2<sup>nd</sup> disciple in John 1:35-40. He is the same writer as 1, 2, 3 John, and Revelation, the apostle John.

John opens by introducing Jesus Christ as the eternal creator, with language alluding to Genesis 1:1. He is God (1:1), not part of creation, but directly working in the creation of all things which came about by the word of God (consider Psa. 33:6) and embodying the word of life (consider Deut. 32:47). The theme of "life" in Christ runs all through John, the word life appearing 36 times in this gospel.

## Luke 1

Luke opens his record of Jesus' the Messiah with an affirmation that he carefully gathered his information from trustworthy sources. His was not the first written account of Jesus' works, but was carefully researched and organized. The original recipient of the treatise, Theophilus (the name means lover of God) may have been someone of high rank, addressed as "most excellent," but no one knows for sure who that was.

Luke gives us several time stamps by mentioning rulers, as for example Herod in 1:5. It is generally believed that Herod died in about 4 BC, but some hold that his death was a couple of years later than that.

Zechariah the priest (v5) was of the division of Abijah, the 8<sup>th</sup> division (recall 1 Chronicles 24:10). Due to the nature of the rotation of priests in those days, Zechariah's service may have been in the spring or the fall.

The term "angel of the Lord" in 1:11 and again in 2:9 is exactly the same in Greek as the term in Exodus 3:2 in the Greek version of the Old Testament.

Notice the character of Zechariah and Elizabeth, 1:6.

When these things occurred both Zechariah and Elizabeth were old, considered past child bearing age. When the angel Gabriel spoke to Zechariah he said “your prayer has been heard...” (1:13). Surely that was not a recent prayer, since it was clearly a prayer to have a child. Even if the prayer was years before, it had been heard, and answered in God’s time and his way.

1:17 refers to Malachi 4:5-6.

Soon after Zechariah went home, his wife Elizabeth was happily pregnant, but kept the matter to herself for several months.

When the same angel of the Lord appeared to Mary in Nazareth the point is made that she was a virgin, that she was legally engaged, that her husband to be was Joseph, and was of the house of David. (1:26-27)

God had chosen Mary with consideration of her character and faithfulness as well, though she was very young. From the name Jesus (1:31) to the description of his identity and authority and duration in v32-33 we have scores of Old Testament prophecies in view.

The role of the Holy Spirit is emphasized, 1:35, and the identity of the male child she would bear.

A sign of affirmation for Mary was the pregnancy of her relative, Elizabeth, which must have been news to Mary. Note the statement about God in v37 and be like Mary in v38.

There is a curious fulfillment of types and shadows in Elizabeth’s greeting of Mary. Note the similarity of how Mary is described in 1:42, and Jael in Judges 5:24. This connects to a Messianic prophecy in Zechariah 10:4 referring to the Christ as cornerstone and tent peg. Jael with the tent peg struck down the enemy of Israel, through his temples. Jesus the seed of woman (Genesis 3:15) would crush the head of the serpent, being born of the most blessed of women.

Six months pregnant, Elizabeth had a baby in her womb, and that baby was influenced by the Spirit of God. (v41)

Mary's magnificent song of praise and thanksgiving (v46-55) highlights her own lack of power or wealth, her humble state, as God kept his promises to help Israel.

Mary went back to Nazareth about the time John was born, herself most likely about 3 months pregnant by that time.

Recall that Ezra and Nehemiah mentioned several times the hand of God being upon them (Ezra 7:6, Nehemiah 2:18, for example). And so we are introduced to John, Luke 1:66.

For the 4<sup>th</sup> time in Luke 1:67 the role of the Holy Spirit in these matters is mentioned. Zechariah's prophecy in 1:68-79 is loaded with allusions to the words of the Old Testament prophets, that what they foretold was finally coming about.

The assessment of John's growing up years in 1:80 brings to mind to other special children given by God, Samson in Judges 13:24 and Samuel in 1 Samuel 2:21.

#### John 1:6-51

The mission of John the Baptist is highlighted here, pointing toward the true Lamb of God. That One is the light of the world (v7), the life giver (v12), the Word in flesh (1:14) who dwelt (literally tabernacled) among us (fulfilling Zechariah 8:3). He is uniquely the Son of God (v14) while all who believe in him can become children of God (v12-13).

Although John was 6 months older than Jesus, he knew that Jesus was before him (v15).

As stated in Luke 1:17, John went in the spirit and power of Elijah, but in the literal terms of the Jews who questioned John, he was not Elijah (John 1:21). He did lay claim to the assignment given in Isaiah 40:3 (John 1:23). John was baptizing in the same area where Elijah had been taken up from Elisha in a whirlwind (John 1:28, 2 Kings 2).

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (1:29) and "he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (1:33). He was anointed with the Holy Spirit after being baptized by John (1:32).

In that area where John was baptizing, some of John's disciples heard what he said about Jesus and followed through by seeking Jesus out. That included Andrew (1:35-42) who spent a few hours with Jesus and was convinced he was Christ. He promptly shared that with his brother Simon Peter, son of Jonah. Jesus said Simon would be called Cephas (Aramaic for a rock) which in Greek is Peter. That nickname is given here, but the occasion that solidified the nickname happened later at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13-19).

In that same vicinity Jesus enrolled Philip and Nathanael. In his encounter with Nathanael Jesus invoked Jacob's dream at Bethel (Genesis 28:10ff) as foreshadowing himself, putting himself in the position of accomplishing the promised blessing of all families of the earth through Jacob's offspring.

It isn't clear whether Jesus' interaction with the 4 disciples here was right after his baptism by John, and just before the 40 days in the wilderness, or if Jesus had already experienced the 40 days in the wilderness and visited John one more time before going to Galilee. I'm inclined to think the former, but it could be either. Either way, when we read of Jesus calling the fishermen to follow him in Capernaum it is after this, and we can be sure they'd already encountered Jesus before he called them.

## Matthew 1

The earliest lists of the 4 gospels by Christian writers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and afterward state that Matthew was the first written gospel, and that Matthew wrote in a Hebrew style. Matthew as a Jew and a tax collector was certainly literate in Greek, and as an apostle he may well have kept notes of Jesus teaching and as they traveled. Matthew was surely one of those sources Luke mentioned in Luke 1:2.

Matthew's opening line, "the generations of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" is loaded with Old Testament reference points. "The generations" is the Greek and English title of the first book of the Bible, Genesis. The word recurs in Genesis 2:4, 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, etc. setting off each major account of the book. Matthew's gospel is about the new beginning. His good news is also an accounting of the fulfillment of God's

covenant with Abraham (Genesis 22:15-18) and God's covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:5-16). Jesus was heir to both of these divinely chosen patriarchs.

The genealogy of Joseph, the legal father of Jesus in Matt 1:2-27 is remarkable in several respects. For one thing, Matthew intentionally arranged the generations in 3 groups of 14, for a total of 42 generations. The number 42 turns up several times in prophetic messages with divine time tables (for example 42 months is the same as 1260 days or 3 ½ years in Revelation 11, 12, 13). In Matthew's columns, he intentionally highlights the call of Abraham, the kingdom of David, and the Babylonian captivity. As reckoned in this genealogy, as in Daniel 9 with the 70 weeks, the era of the Babylonian captivity didn't end until the anointed one (Christ) came.

Another remarkable aspect of Matthew's genealogy is the inclusion of 5 women. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary are each remarkable in various ways, including faithfulness, and each also would have borne some scorn for their history... Mary's particular scorn is highlighted in Matthew 1, a young woman pregnant before marriage, and not by her fiancé.

Notice that Joseph was the son of Jacob, a divine affirmation of Jacob blessing both Judah and Joseph with Messianic promises in Genesis 49. Notice too that this Joseph in Matthew had prophetic dreams, as did Joseph in Genesis.

Matthew, like Luke, states Mary's pregnancy was by the power of the Holy Spirit. We also have a glimpse of Joseph's character and generous heart with his intention to shield Mary when he assumed she was pregnant by some other man.

"Son of David" is/was a recognized title for the Messiah. The name Jesus is especially appropriate for its meaning, savior, and its connections to Joshua the heir of Moses and Joshua the high priest and temple builder in Ezra and Zechariah.

In 1:23 Matthew cites Isaiah 7:14, and quotes it from the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament. Matthew will repeatedly cite Old Testament prophecies as fulfilled in Jesus (1:22, 2:15, 2:23, 3:15, etc) and will allude to others by his language.

Joseph most likely died before Jesus began his public ministry, but Matthew certainly knew Mary personally and had opportunity to hear the story of Jesus' birth and childhood from her own lips.

## Luke 2

Luke wrote his gospel before 62 AD... we know that because the book of Acts, by the same writer, concludes in 62 AD. He may have written during the time Paul spent in Caesarea, 58-60 AD. Most likely Mary the mother of Jesus was still alive and among the brethren in Jerusalem in those days and available to Luke as a source. She would have been probably in her mid 70 to late 70s at that time. Tradition has it she moved to Ephesus with John the apostle in the mid 60s AD as Jerusalem was filled with turmoil from 66 til its destruction in 70 AD.

Luke, writing about real events in the real world again connects the narrative to historical characters in 2:1-2. Augustus ruled 31 BC to 14 AD. The additional mention of Quirinius suggests about 4 BC for the decree mentioned.

Because of the Roman registration Joseph and his pregnant virgin wife traveled from the mountains of Galilee, Nazareth, to the hills of Judea, Bethlehem. Bethlehem of course was the city of David's family and childhood, and was pointed out by the prophet Micah as the place the Messiah would come from, Micah 5.

Note that Jesus is Mary's "firstborn son" (Luke 2:7) and that she and Joseph refrained from marital sex until she gave birth to him (Matthew 1:24-25). She was the virgin mother of Jesus, but did not continue to be a virgin after that.

The word "inn" in several English translations of 2:7 is unfortunate. It is the exact same word as us used in Luke 22:11 and Mark 14:14, a guest room. Joseph and Mary no doubt had relatives in Bethlehem, but in the circumstances the upstairs guest room was not available, and they made the best of it, probably in a downstairs area of the house. The manger doesn't indicate a stable, many families in those days kept a few animals in a courtyard of the household. The manger in Bethlehem was most likely a feed trough worked into a stone of appropriate size, not made of wood.

The shepherds evoke imagery of divine shepherding and shepherds who followed the Lord all through the Old Testament from Abel to Abraham to Moses to David, and the 23 Psalm and the words of the prophets. There is also a connection to Micah 4:8, which precedes the Bethlehem prophecy of Micah 5:2. In Micah 4:8 the “tower of the flock”, a shepherds’ watch tower, was to be visited on a hill near Jerusalem (Bethlehem is such a place, a daughter of Zion) with the coming of the former dominion or kingship. That prophecy in turn connects back to Jacob’s camping place in Genesis 35:21, “the tower of Eder” which is the exact same Hebrew words as Micah’s “tower of the flock.” Jacob camped there after burying Rachel near Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19-21). Jeremiah in turn evokes Rachel’s mourning near Bethlehem in Jer. 31:15 which Matthew applied to the murder of the young boys of Bethlehem in Matthew 2:18. These prophecies fulfilled in Jesus are an intricately connected web woven together over thousands of years.

Despite the connection to great men like Moses and David, shepherds were very low on the social scale. Choosing shepherds as witnesses was choosing the lowliest of people in that culture.

The shepherds in the field near Bethlehem tell us nothing of the time of year. There would have been shepherds in those fields year round. And the Talmud indicates the flocks near Bethlehem were probably flocks kept for temple sacrifices.

The Lord’s angel in Luke 2:9-12 was on a mission. The heavenly host in v13-14 was reacting exuberantly to the unfolding circumstances of God’s word fulfilled. 1 Peter 1:12 indicates that angels as well as prophets were baffled and curious about how God was going to accomplish his promises of redemption, until he acted by sending his Son and it unfolded before their eyes. Angels are shown to have “free will” and the heavenly host praising God that night was acting in joyful celebration of the birth of God’s son.

Luke 2:19, 51 suggest that Mary related these things that she treasured and pondered to others, like Luke and Matthew.

Notice how Luke, himself a gentile, highlights the obedience of Joseph and Mary to the Law (2:22-23, 39).

Even though the testimonies of the shepherds and others, including those about John in Luke 1:66, were largely lost in time, they nevertheless would not have been forgotten 30 years later when John was preaching and Jesus began to teach and perform miracles. It was all part of setting the stage for Jesus purposes to be accomplished.

The required sacrifice in Luke 2:24 affirms that Joseph and Mary were poor and could not afford a lamb (Leviticus 12:8).

At the temple Jesus was acclaimed by inspired voices of prophecy, an old man and an old woman. Her being of the tribe of Asher (2:36) notes the inclusion of all Israel in the divine redemption, and his prophecy embraced the nations (2:32). Luke's sketch of Anna's history suggests she was well remembered for years by people coming and going at the temple. Again, "the redemption of Jerusalem" in 2:38 suggests dozens of prophetic promises Jesus would fulfill, in ways people (and angels) had not imagined.

As often happens in Biblical narratives, Luke omitted year or so in Bethlehem and the journey to Egypt reported in Matthew 2 and jumped forward to the return to Nazareth in v39. In a similar way he omitted Paul's sojourn in Arabia (Galatians 1:17-18), not as a mistake, but as an abridgement to focus on the details pertinent to his purposes. All authors and story tellers choose what details to include and what to omit. We can find many such examples in comparing gospel to gospel.

As with Luke 1:66, 80 we are reminded in Luke 2:40, 52 that Jesus was a child of promise... but a child nonetheless who grew and learned and matured.

The account of Jesus' prolonged visit to the temple when he was 12 suggests, among other things, that while he was very bright and had a wonderful grasp of things found in the scriptures, all of that was packaged in the body and experiences of a 12 year old boy. His puzzlement over Mom and Dad searching for him for 3 days (3 days!) indicates the immaturity of a 12 year old, even while he could reason with the scholars at the temple.

(Connecting the 3 days in 2:46 and 3 days of his death burial and resurrection, we can also connect the question in 2:49 with the question in 24:5.)

As Jesus grew in three particular ways, in “wisdom and in stature and in favor (grace) with God and man,” (2:52, 40) so his body, the church, is to grow still.

## Matthew 2

The time line in Matthew 2 indicates young Jesus was a year or more old, not more than 2, by the “magi” came from the east to honor him. The little family was staying in a house at that time, whether with relatives or on their own we don’t know.

The word “magi” in Matthew 2:1, 7, is rendered “wise men” in several English versions. The same word in the Greek translation of Daniel 2:2, 10, etc is translated “magicians” as is also the typical translation in Acts 13:6, 8, of Elymus Barjesus. These travelers were noteworthy because they came from a powerful kingdom that was the enemy of Herod and of Rome, and because they were most likely not Jewish. Yet they knew of the Jewish prophecies of a coming king, and as astrologers observing the sky saw the movement of a star that led them to seek the young king. It is not astonishing that there should be signs in the sky, in the host of heaven, proclaiming the glory of God in the birth of Jesus, but it is somewhat remarkable that Chaldean magicians could read those signs correctly while the Jews took no notice. See Daniel 6:27, Luke 21:25, and consider Genesis 1:14. The nations with their gods abused the signs in the heavens (Jeremiah 10:2) with false prophecies and misdirected worship, but God has chosen to use heavenly portents in various ways, including a special alignment of one or more stars when Jesus came into the world as a human.

Even when the eastern magicians spoke (convincingly) of the birth of the king of the Jews, the scholars of Judaism in Jerusalem didn’t get excited or show any interest. They could cite Micah’s prophecy, but they made no effort to test the story of the magicians. Herod, however, in his paranoia and pursuit of power took them seriously, and intentionally planned to defy God.

The expensive gifts of the magi no doubt were immediately helpful to Joseph as they abruptly had to flee as refugees to Egypt.

Joseph again had a dream from the Lord, warning him of Herod's duplicitous plan to destroy their son. The journey into Egypt for a time sets in motion a fulfillment Matthew calls to our attention in 2:14-15. Hosea 11:1, cited by Matthew, was a prophecy relating to the kingdom of Israel which had failed to be God's faithful servant, from the time he brought them out of Egypt. Matthew certainly knew the context well, and isn't just making a play on words here. Jesus came to fulfill the purposes God always had for Israel, to personify Israel and fulfill all the obligations to the Law and to the promises of a chosen people and kingdom of priests to serve God. Identifying Israel as God's firstborn goes all the way back to Moses at the bush and before Pharaoh in Exodus 4:22-23.

Jesus was born in the shadow of king Herod. Southeast of Bethlehem Herod had built a fortress palace called Herodium on an artificially raised mountain, visible on Bethlehem's eastern horizon, and whose shadow fell over Bethlehem on winter mornings. Herod had several similar palace fortresses to which he could retreat if attacked, or where he could enjoy the life of luxury in peace and security. When Herod realized the magi weren't coming back as agreed, in rage he ordered the death of the young boys of Bethlehem. This was outrageously gratuitous brutality, but far from the most outrageous or brutal acts of Herod. Again, when Matthew cited Jeremiah's prophecy about Rachel weeping for her children (2:17-18, Jeremiah 31:15) he knew full well the context of the original prophecy. He knew the story of Rachel's death in childbirth, near Bethlehem and near the tower of the flock, from Genesis 35:16-21, and he knew Jeremiah was watching the destruction of the Jews at the hands of the Babylonians when he wrote that message. Linking these events for us Matthew, as in chapter 1, says that nothing had changed, not of a woman's travail in childbirth (Genesis 3:16), nor of the oppression of Israel under the heel of Babylon, whose current face was Herod and Rome. The Messiah came to face the curse and overcome it, to deal with the grief and the oppression of God's people. Rachel and Leah are lauded as the mothers of Israel, the housebuilders of the nation (Ruth 4:11). As Ruth (and Tamar before her) filled that role for a time in her generation, producing the lineage of the lion of Judah, so Mary filled that role in a final way, producing the lion of Judah himself, and thwarting the plans of the pretender, Herod and the dragon who gave him authority.

After the horrifically painful death of Herod (as described by Josephus), was not long after his attempt to kill young Jesus, Joseph dreamed again

an inspired dream directing him to go back to Israel. The language sending Joseph back to Israel is very similar to God's words to Moses, sending him back to Egypt (compare Matthew 2:20, Exodus 4:19). Again, Matthew and his first readers certainly knew their scriptures and most likely appreciated the connection of Moses the redeemer sent by God and Jesus the redeemer provided by God.

No one today knows for sure what connection Matthew was pointing out in 2:23. One reasonable guess is the similar sound of "Nazarene" and the Hebrew word for "the Branch," which is "neser" in Isaiah 11:1. Another guess is that the word Nazarene was almost synonymous with "despised" (see John 1:45-46) and the prophets had foretold Jesus being despised (Psalm 22:6, Isaiah 53:3, for example). Most likely Matthew's first readers understood very well the connection he was making, even if we're uncertain. Jesus is frequently referred to as a Nazarene (that is, from Nazareth, as in Matt 26:71, Luke 18:37, John 18:5, 19:9, Acts 2:22, etc.) and the whole church was disparagingly called "the sect of the Nazarenes" by its Jewish opponents (Acts 24:5).

### Matthew 3

John's garb was reminiscent of Elijah, 2 Kings 1:8 (and perhaps other prophets, Zechariah 13:4). These are coarse clothes, worn by a man used to hardship. His diet too speaks of subsistence on the wilds, poverty and dependance on no one but the Lord.

John the Baptist referred to the religious leaders who came out to observe him as a "brood of vipers." Jesus echoed that language in Matthew 12:34, 23:33. The one other use of the same word "viper" in the New Testament was when Paul was bitten by one in Acts 28:3. In the instance of Matthew 12:34 the poison of the vipers was in their words, attributing Jesus' mighty works to the devil. In Matthew 23:33 the poison of the vipers was in their violence against the servants of God, their impending violence against Jesus himself. They were trees that looked good but produced bad fruit.

When John and Jesus spoke of "the wrath to come" they sometimes meant eternal judgment and sometimes the Roman doom hanging over rebellious Israel, sometimes both.

Jesus is described in all four gospels and in Acts as baptizing with the Holy Spirit, not merely water as John did. And with fire. Those seem to be opposite alternatives, since the fire is associated with purging the waste in Matthew 3:12. It's either the Holy Spirit sent by Jesus or else it's the fire of judgment, which has been entrusted to him.

John's baptism called for repentance, and was aimed at Jews under the covenants of Abraham and Moses. It carried no promise of new life by the Spirit. When Jesus came to John for baptism it wasn't for forgiveness of sins, but "to fulfill all righteousness." When he obeyed the divine directive the Spirit came down upon visibly, as a dove might descend. Peter identified that as the moment when Jesus was anointed, by God, with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:37-38), and one of the instances where a voice from heaven declared Jesus to be the Son of God.

## Mark 1

The gospel (good news) of Mark was described by ancient Christians as being the spoken words of Peter written down by John Mark, perhaps in Rome in the mid 60s. That description fits the contents and style very well.

Mark begins with the affirmation of good news about Jesus, and that Jesus is the anointed (Christ) and the Son of God. That's what the good news is all about.

The prophecies cited in 1:2-3 are compiled from Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1.

The primary focus of John's preaching cited here, besides his baptism of repentance for forgiveness, is the coming of the mightier one after himself, namely Jesus.

Mark's vocabulary about heaven opening when Jesus was baptized is very dramatic, "torn open" (Mark 1:10). It's the same Greek word for the tearing of the temple curtain in Mark 15:38.

Mark notes without detail the 40 days of wilderness testing by the adversary. Both the 40 days, reminding us of experiences of Noah, and Moses, and Israel, and Elijah; and the wilderness, where Israel was tested 40 years are significant enough to be highlighted. The mention of wild

animals and the presence of angels also connect the Christ to Adam, the first man in his sinless state, and the prophets of the Old Testament.

The message of fulfillment and the imminent arrival of God's kingdom in 1:15 sets the stage for how we should read the Old Testament prophets. What's unfolding in Jesus' words and deeds are what the Law and Prophets were preparing for.

Simon (Peter) and Andrew had already met Jesus, as described in John 1, across the Jordan in the southern region not far from Jericho. The net they were casting was a weighted hand thrown net used near the shore, not the net lowered from a boat and dragged. The nets being mended by the Zebedee crew were the larger nets used from boats.

The four fisherman were successful enough to have houses, multiple boats, and hired hands to help with the work. They were competent at what they did, and hard workers with a profitable business. All of which they left behind to follow Jesus. The "fishers of men" premise might remind us of Ezekiel 47:10.

Capernaum, where Peter and the other fishermen lived, would be the center of Jesus' lengthy ministry in the Galilee.

The first miracle described by Mark was casting out a demon on the Sabbath. Jesus' authority over demons, his authority over the Sabbath (Law), and his authoritative teaching were hallmarks of his ministry that certainly distinguished him from the Jewish rabbis (teachers) and scribes (scholars). Demons repeatedly identified Jesus and his supernatural identity, and were always rebuked by Jesus (1:25, 34).

v27 "they were all amazed" is going to be a typical sort of assessment in Mark of how people reacted to Jesus, including his chosen disciples.

Peter's house in Capernaum has been identified with good confidence in the ruins of the ancient city, the house where Jesus stayed over and over again, which was the scene of numerous miracles, beginning with the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. Mark emphasized the immediate and total healing, noting that she went straight from bed to hospitality when Jesus healed her.

Jesus came to preach the good news, and work wonders in affirmation of his message all over Israel (1:38-39), but to do that he needed quiet time in prayer with the Father, which he sought out again and again (1:35).

In rapid succession Mark has given a wide range of miracles Jesus did that showed the depth of his power and authority, as well as his character. In the healing of the leper (40-45) there is a strong emphasis on Jesus stern instructions to the man, which the man promptly ignored. Jesus did what he could with the immediate and total healing, but the leper rejected the specific commands of Jesus (and of Moses) and did what was more exciting to himself, which hindered the work that Jesus came to do. No doubt the leper's disobedience seemed quite reasonable to himself, but it was wrong and not helpful to the Lord.

### Luke 3

Luke supplied pointers to the year that John was called to prophesy in the wilderness, but because of some ambiguity regarding Tiberius Caesar we can't be completely certain. Probably the year indicated is 26 AD.

Annas and Caiaphas in v2, with Caiaphas being son-in-law to Annas, represent the political and religious ambiguity of the position of high priest in those days. The Romans deposed Annas as high priest in 15 AD, but many of the Jews still considered him the legitimate high priest, while a succession of 4 sons and a son-in-law filled the role under Roman authority, and so the high priesthood was substantially the Annas dynasty for several decades.

Luke described several groups of people who sought direction from John the Baptizer in 3:10-14, including tax collectors and soldiers. Both would, in this instance, have been Jews who were collaborating with the Roman authorities. The temple, the Herods, were allowed by the Romans to have small military forces for their protection and to enforce their authority. Both tax collectors and soldiers were notorious for abusing the power of their position to take advantage of their fellow Jews.

John, like other prophets before him, spoke to Herod Antipas, nominally a Jew who participated in temple ordinances, about his sins against the Law of God, and was imprisoned for his faithfulness.

The genealogy of Jesus given in Luke 3:23-38 is most likely his real human parentage, that is, Mary's patrimony. The "as was supposed" in reference to Joseph in v23 surely tells us this is Jesus' genealogy, not literally Joseph's. Under Israelite law there were various ways that Mary's father could have been considered Joseph's legal heritage (including the case of Zelophehad's daughters in Numbers 27, 36). This genealogy runs through David (v31) but it is his 3<sup>rd</sup> son by Bathsheba, Nathan, rather than Solomon, and while Matthew's genealogy began with Abraham, emphasizing the covenant promises, Luke's goes back to Adam, and God the creator. As Paul stated in Romans 1:3 (see also Acts 13:23, 2 Samuel 7:12), Jesus was descended from David in the flesh. Since he was not literally the son of Joseph, Mary was certainly descended from David, a lineage provided by Luke.

#### Matthew 4

Matthew 4:1 follows 3:17. That's important, though chapter divisions introduced into the text for convenience might obscure the relationship. Jesus is the Son of God. As the Son of God he fulfills the role of Israel (remember Matt 2:15, Hosea 11:1, Ex 4:22-23). Matthew 4 continues that theme, with God's Son, led by the Holy Spirit, going into the wilderness to be tested, just as the LORD led Israel into the wilderness to be tested (Deuteronomy 8:2-3).

The tempter in Matthew 4:1-11 has no proper name in Scripture. He is called the serpent, the ancient serpent, the dragon, the devil, the satan, and other titular and descriptive terms, but no proper name. He is "the devil" which means accuser or slanderer (4:1); "the tempter" which means one who tests, perhaps maliciously (4:3); and "satan" which means adversary or enemy (4:10).

With the journey into the wilderness to be tested we are reminded of Israel in the wilderness. Israel's 40 years were determined by 40 days of spying out the land, and of course Moses spent 40 days without food on the mountain receiving God's commandments.

The 3 tests recorded in 4:1-11 are typical. That is, they are real challenges Jesus faced and they represent the range of temptations humans face.

Each time the devil challenged Jesus, Jesus responded with a citation from Deuteronomy, and in particular from Deuteronomy 6-8 where Moses was reviewing Israel's relationship with God during their 40 years in the wilderness. These citations affirm the Israel/Son of God/Jesus motif. Jesus understood what was happening, and why he was there.

The voice from heaven declared Jesus to be God's Son. Satan said, "if you are..." At the close of his ministry Jesus' adversaries echoed Satan as Jesus was crucified (Matt 27:40).

Jesus humbled himself and became a man (Philippians 2:7). As a man he experienced hunger, and as a man he prayed to the Father for supply of daily bread (Matt 6:11). He had the power to turn stones to bread (or to come down from the cross) but he had put it aside to be a servant. The temptation to use his divine authority to fill his belly was an invitation to negate his whole purpose in coming. The answer (4:4), from Deut 8:3, Moses explaining God's purpose in letting Israel get hungry (Exodus 16) and then giving them manna so that they would learn to trust him and follow his word.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> test the devil cites scripture with a twist. The pinnacle of the temple was probably the place of trumpeting that was a high platform above the Kidron Valley. Ultimately, Jesus did plan to come to that temple and present himself as Son of David and Son of God, but it wasn't the time or the way. The Psalm cited by the devil promises God's care for his faithful, ironically in terms that included assurance of protection from demonic forces served by pagans, but is certainly not an invitation for the godly to demand God's protection from foolhardy risks. Again, Jesus refused the twist by citing God's word, Deut. 6:16, where Moses reflected back again to the beginning of the Exodus when the people complained about water (Ex 17:1-7) and God met their needs, but reproached them for their impatience.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> test was the offer of a shortcut to power over the kingdoms of the earth. Jesus, the Son, came to rule the nations with a rod of iron (Psalm 2). Why not take an easy path to "victory" over the nations as regent of the devil? The same sort of temptation again was there when Jesus faced the cross and he asserted that he could choose conquest of the earth by force rather than conquest by submission to death (Matt 26:53). But it would have been an earth with spoiled splendor, without redemption or hope. And

so Jesus again turned his recollection to Deuteronomy 6:13, and the context of the oneness of God and the greatest commandment (Deut. 6:4-5).

Angels ministering (4:11, “deacon-ing”) to Jesus might remind us of numerous Old Testament saints, but Elijah in the wilderness for 40 days en route to Sinai particularly comes to mind (1 Kings 19:5-8).

Matthew 4:12 effectively skips over material included by John when Jesus spent time in Jerusalem and Judea before shifting his focus almost exclusively to Galilee after John’s imprisonment.

Matthew frequently reminds the reader that Jesus was fulfilling the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, as in the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2 cited in Matt 4:12-16. While Matthew quoted only 2 verses, he certainly was aware of the whole context, as would many of the first (Jewish) readers have been; the prophecy of a kingdom of peace, the son who would reign, and his identity as wonderful counselor, mighty God, prince of peace, etc.

Jesus’ first meeting with Simon (Peter) and Andrew was recorded in John 1. Matthew, Mark, and Luke pick up the story in Galilee after Jesus had begun his preaching, teaching, and wondrous works. Clearly, the 4 fishermen knew enough about Jesus when he called them to make a huge commitment to follow him.

Jesus’ authority over the maladies of this world was complete, and Matthew gives a wide ranging list in 4:23-25, as well as an indication of how widespread his fame was, encompassing all of the territory of ancient Israel in her greatest days when David and Solomon reigned.

Luke 4-5

Notice that when Jesus was tempted he was “full of the Holy Spirit” (4:1) even when he was empty of food (4:2).

Luke 4:1-15 parallels Matthew 4:1-17, but with some important differences in emphasis.

As Matthew 4:1 flows directly from the acclamation of Jesus as the

beloved Son of God, Luke 4:1 flows directly from the genealogy of Jesus citing “Adam, the son of God.” One aspect of Luke’s emphasis in the temptations is considering Jesus as Adam (the Hebrew word Adam is the Hebrew word man; Jesus is the man who is the Son of God; Jesus is the last Adam, Romans 5:12ff, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45). The first Adam yielded to sin, and lost God’s paradise. The last Adam came to defeat the serpent, overcoming sin. Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are (Hebrews 2:18, 4:15). The 3 listed temptations of Jesus cover the range of the kinds of things people are tempted by, from the Garden (Genesis 3:6) to the 1<sup>st</sup> century (1 John 2:16) and today and always. Jesus categorically refused the temptations that brought death upon Adam and Eve. Where Adam as God’s son failed, and Israel as God’s son failed, Jesus as God’s Son succeeded.

Luke shifted the order of the temptations, presenting the temptation to worship the devil and receive worldly power 2<sup>nd</sup> instead of 3<sup>rd</sup>. His language suggests that the perspective was a visionary experience (in a moment, v5) not merely geographic.

Luke gives the temptation at the pinnacle of the temple last, and where Matthew mentioned “the holy city,” a clear description of Jerusalem from the Old Testament, Luke calls the city by name. In Luke-Acts the author emphasizes Jerusalem as the starting point for the divine mission to take the gospel to the nations. That mission depended on Jesus entering Jerusalem and the temple in a very different way than that proposed by the devil. Luke did note that the devil wasn’t done with Jesus, just biding his time (4:13).

Again with the emphasis on the Spirit, Luke turns our attention to the beginning of the Galilean ministry (4:14-15), and Jesus’ early successes and good reputation. Then comes the Nazareth incident, where Jesus went to his childhood home town (4:16ff), read a portion of prophecy of jubilee (the year of God’s favor) from Isaiah 61, and claimed that he himself was fulfilling the work of the anointed one (Messiah or Christ).

Jesus’ reference to Elijah and Elisha (4:24-27) reminds us of the promise in Malachi, of Elijah coming to prepare the way; and the 3 ½ years reference connects to Daniel’s prophecy in Daniel 9 as well, the duration of the Messiah’s work. Luke also frequently emphasized the gospel being for all the nations, and that’s a theme here. The suggestion that the people of

Jesus' home town were like the generation of Ahab and Jezebel enraged them, and so they behaved like the generation of Ahab and Jezebel, attempting to kill God's prophet. The fall from the crest of the hill in Nazareth behind the synagogue would have been a very long drop to the Valley of Jezreel far below, but Jesus passed through the crowd unharmed and moved to Peter's house in Caesarea.

With summary statements of Jesus mighty works, Luke gives us one of Jesus' descriptions of his purpose in the world, Luke 4:43. Then 5:1 affirms that what Jesus was presenting was "the word of God."

The story in Luke 5:1-11 probably the same day and circumstances as Jesus calling the 4 fishermen in Matthew 4:18-22, with some added details of events that day omitted by Matthew and Mark. They in turn present some other details that Luke passed over. Story telling is like that, two recollections of the same event can have many different details and still be truthful. We can be sure the events are accurately described in each case, with different highlights. In Luke's history, we see the power of Jesus displayed in way that was especially impressive and humbling for the fishermen, making a scene not unlike the call of God's prophets in past (Isaiah 6, for example, when Isaiah saw his sinfulness before the throne of God).

The events in 5:17-26 appears to have happened at the home of Simon and Andrew in Capernaum. The healing of the paralytic was an opportunity to proclaim the authority of the Son of Man to forgive sins, a theme emphasized many times in Luke. The miracles were in large measure to affirm the identity of Jesus so that we might believe in him and be saved, not an end in themselves.

The call of Levi (Matthew) the tax collector was also at Capernaum, where they was a tax collection booth on the major highway (the Way of The Sea) crossing from the territory of Herod Antipas to that of Herod Phillip. Luke emphasized the generous nature of Levi's feast and the large number of his associates who attended (Matthew's own account of the same event is much more humble).

Fasting in 5:33-38 is legitimate part of Kingdom life, according to Jesus. Not as a ritual from ancient tradition... the new Kingdom was in the works, and celebration in the air... but as a discipline of the church while awaiting

the return of the bridegroom. Rituals of the Law and traditions of the fathers have no place in the Lord's kingdom, but there is a place for fasting among God's people in this world.

John 2-4

John 2

"On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day". John 1:19, 29, 35, 39-40, 43, and 2:1 appear to cover a week, 7 or 8 days. The setting is a wedding celebration, which is fitting for the introduction of he who is the celestial bridegroom.

Notice the words of Jesus in 2:4 and then 19:26. Several times in John 2-11 Jesus said "my time/hour has not yet come." From 12-19 he spoke of the his hour/time as having come. This encounter between Jesus and Mary comes full circle at the cross.

Mary didn't necessarily expect Jesus to do a miracle, she just expected her smart firstborn son to do something to correct the problem. She didn't expect him to do it alone, she directed the servants to do whatever he wanted. Apparently she had some standing with the host.

Stone water jars for ritual washing because stone could not be made "unclean" and therefore required to be broken as clay pots could be.

Water is normally turned to wine by time and work and living processes, but Jesus bypassed the time and work and processes, as only the creator of time and life could do. Everyone who drank the wine would presume the normal processes, and never guess that it had been water minutes earlier. As when God created a fully operational universe in 6 days that would appear to have taken vast amounts of time to develop if there were only natural processes.

As every good and perfect gift comes from above, so the wine Jesus produced was the best quality.

John lists a total of 7 miraculous signs in chapters 1-11 that testify to the nature and character of Jesus and his authority. The 2<sup>nd</sup> is in 4:43-54. John plainly says Jesus did many other miracles (2:23) and that he recorded a selected set to promote belief (20:30-31).

Wine was an appropriate pointer to the coming of the Christ in several ways, including Genesis 49:11-12, Deut 32:9-14, Isaiah 55:1, and Joel 3:17-18.

The signs done by Jesus stand apart from those done by the word or hand of any prophet because they “manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him” (John 2:11).

John 2:13 is the first of 3 Passovers specifically mentioned by John. The clearing of the temple court recorded here appears to be an opening barrage in the conflict between Jesus and the corrupt rulers of Israel. A similar event is recorded in Jesus’ final week of confrontations (Matthew 21:12ff), probably 3 years after this first confrontation. Despite all that Jesus did, no particular changes had occurred in Jerusalem in that time.

The sign of the resurrection (2:18-32) is the great sign of the gospel.

### John 3

Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus, in the night perhaps to avoid notice, focused on the idea of new birth by the Spirit of God. Entering God’s kingdom calls for a new birth, by water and Spirit. When Nicodemus demurred, seemingly confused, Jesus asserted that this concept was in the scriptures Nicodemus knew and taught. Such passages as Isaiah 44:3-5 and Ezekiel 36:24-27 anticipated the washing and renewal by water and Spirit that Jesus spoke of.

The prophetic sign of the uplifted serpent in the wilderness points up, among other things, that Jesus wasn’t going to change the world we live in so much as change the hearts of the people in the world who look to him. There will still be sin and suffering in the world, but redemption for those who look to him in faith. The great choice God has made freely available through his Son, eternal life through faith in Christ, or the consequences of a life lived in the dark rebellion of sin. Apart from Christ, we stand condemned by our own choices, while in Christ we have life in the light.

John the Baptist’s role and attitude is revisited in 3:22-30, one who prepared the way for the Christ, and one who celebrated Jesus’ coming as a best man celebrates the wedding of the groom.

As in chapter 1, the uniqueness of Jesus, his divine nature and willing submission, are highlighted in 3:31-36. Notice that “believes in the Son” and “obey the Son” are used as synonymous phrases in 3:36.

## John 4

Jesus and the Samaritan woman highlights several important themes. The location of Jacob’s well suggest that Sychar is Shechem, or a village very close to Shechem, a very important site for the Patriarch’s, and especially Jacob. This is the foot of the mountains of blessing and cursing in Joshua. The altar Israel built at that time was up the hill on Mt Ebal. At the end of his life Joshua had gathered the Israelites to this place to renew their covenant commitment to God. In the time frame of Nehemiah the Samaritans had built a temple up the hill on Mt Gerazim. All of that was backdrop for the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Once again we have the theme of renewal by water, this time “living water” provided by Jesus (see John 7:37-39 for an explanation of his words). We have Jesus crossing social boundaries to talk to a lone woman, and to talk to a Samaritan at that.

When Jesus took the conversation to a personal level, mentioning the woman’s husband and knowing her situation explicitly, she hastily shifted the conversation to issues between Jews and Samaritans. The Samaritan temple on Mt Gerazim was nothing but a ruin because the Jews had conquered them and destroyed that temple a hundred years earlier. Jesus’ response in 4:21, 23-24 anticipates the temple he would build, his body, the church, which depends on no particular location or structure, but instead is built on the Spirit dwelling in the believer(s). The conversation persuaded the woman that Jesus is the Christ,

John mentions the Aramaic word, messiah, twice (4:25, 1:41), and each time gives the Greek equivalent, Christ. These are the only times the term messiah is used in the whole New Testament. Jesus was presented to the Greek speaking world of the 1<sup>st</sup> century as Christ, and his followers became known as Christians. This was God’s choice of times and circumstances and language.

Jesus’ words that day, “I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor,” echoed Joshua’s words at that same place 1400 years earlier when

he called upon Israel to worship only the LORD in the abundant land he'd given to them. See Joshua 24:13.

In contrast to Jesus' reception at Jerusalem by the rulers, the Samaritans believed because of words, first the woman's testimony, and then Jesus' own words.

When Jesus returned to Galilee he was asked to heal a very sick son of an official. Jesus did that by challenging the man's belief, and telling him the healing was done. Commendably, the official believed what Jesus told him. This healing from a distance is the 2<sup>nd</sup> sign John highlighted (which is not to say the 2<sup>nd</sup> miracle, there had been others as mentioned in 2:23).

## Matthew 8

The healing of the leper in Matthew 8:1-4 is paralleled in Mark 1:40-44 and Luke 5:12-14. Matthew focuses on the miracle itself, rather than the outcome of the man's failure to follow instructions as in Mark.

The centurion who asked for help for his servant in Matthew 8:5-13 is also pictured in Luke 7:1-10. Matthew describes the interchange about authority between Jesus and the centurion, Luke included details of how servants and friends facilitated the exchange. Jesus was greatly impressed by the gentile soldier's faith and understanding of power, and greatly commended the man. Such people of faith, whether Jew or Gentile, will join together with the Patriarchs in the festal celebrations of the kingdom of heaven. The unhappy alternative to the kingdom of heaven for those who don't live by faith is outer darkness filled with conflict and suffering.

The healing of Peter's mother-in-law in 8:14-16 is also recounted in Mark 1:29-34 and Luke 4:38-41. Matthew in v17 again reminds us Jesus was fulfilling the words of the prophets in his works and words, in this case from Isaiah 53.

The contrast between what Jesus had in glory with the Father and what he had as a preacher of the kingdom of heaven was extreme, as in 8:20. Following Jesus into glory calls for following him in a sacrificial life, as also in Luke 9:57-60.

The pertinent question in Matthew 8:27 is, "What kind of man is" Jesus?

The same power that was evidenced in Jonah 1 is evidenced here. As Jonah slept in the storm, so did Jesus. But Jesus himself was not the reason for the tempest, on the contrary his presence on the boat was assurance of divine providence, and he has the authority of the Creator of the cosmos to command wind and wave. See also Mark 4:36-41 and Luke 8:22-25.

The casting out of the demons in Matthew 8:28-34 (and Mar 5:1-7, Luke 8:26-37) highlights the fact that Jesus wasn't just a Jewish prophet. His power over the devil(s) was just as effective among the gentiles. The futility of mercy for demons is demonstrated too. They've chosen a course of self-destruction and aren't turning back from it. They know that there is an appointed time of judgment. Some people, seeing the power of Jesus, want nothing to do with him.

## Mark 2

Jesus has the power to forgive sins, which requires the authority of a priest, is demonstrated in the account of forgiving and healing the paralyzed man (Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:18-26, Matthew 9:2-8). After the debacle in Nazareth (Luke 4), Capernaum had become Jesus' home, and in particular the house of Peter. That's the setting for the crowded house and men digging through the roof to get their paralyzed friend in front of Jesus. As with the centurion in Matthew 8:5ff, Jesus approved of their faith.

Jesus not only had the power to heal and the authority to forgive sins, he also had/has spiritual insight into the thoughts of men.

When people saw Jesus's works they often praised God, as in Mark 2:12.

The call of Levi/Matthew is recounted in Luke 5:27-32 and Matthew 9:9-13, as well as Mark 2:13-17. The recognized religious leaders did not approve of Jesus mingling with Matthew and his sort. Jesus had no problem explaining why, in v17, though the true answer also sounds a bit ironic in the context.

As also in Luke 5:33-38 and Matthew 9:14-17 Jesus disciples stood apart from those who were in the mainstream of Jewish practices, even John's disciples, because they were not participating in the traditional fasts.

Jesus explained that they were in the best of times in his presence, but the time would come when his disciples would fast, in the spirit of Isaiah 58:6ff.

The Sabbath, Mark 2:23-28, was a frequent source of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders who had developed strict traditions defining Sabbath rest (see also Matthew 12:1-8 and Luke 6:1-5 for this encounter). When Jesus' disciples were accused of breaking the Sabbath Jesus didn't defend them by rejecting the traditions they embraced (it wasn't necessarily unlawful to pluck and eat a few heads of grain on the Sabbath, but it was unlawful to cook food or harvest grain). Jesus' reasoning though was far more expansive, showing that God's purposes are not always met by rigid rituals. Again, this is the same spirit as Isaiah 58:6ff on fasting.

If Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, then he must be Creator of the cosmos, since that's where the Sabbath was first sanctified, Genesis 2:1ff.

## John 5

After an interval in Galilee (John 4:43-54) Jesus again went to Jerusalem for a Jewish festival, probably either Passover, Pentecost or Tabernacles, but John didn't specify which one.

John's geographical comment about the Bethesda Pool, like other similar comments, suggests that the gospel was written before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, since he wrote of such landmarks in the present tense, "there is in Jerusalem..."

The colonnades or porticos of the Bethesda Pool were lost to history and difficult to imagine, as seen in many commentaries over the years, until archaeologists uncovered the ancient pool a few decades ago, considerably below modern street level, and found a structure just as John described.

In the KJV tradition and some Greek texts there is mention of an angel stirring the waters of the pool. Most older Greek texts and newer translations do not include that explanation in v3b-4 for the gathering of sick people. It is very possible such a tradition existed, similar traditions exist today, but not likely John stated it nor that an angel of God worked in such a capricious manner.

Jesus took note of a particular invalid who'd been lying there by the pool for a very long time and proffered the notion of healing, which he definitely desired. Jesus in fact did heal the man, and instructed him to take his bed, or mat, and walk. Because it was the Sabbath, some observant Jews hassled the man about carrying his bed/mat. He deflected blame, as people in trouble will do, blaming the healer, but couldn't name him. That aspect is intriguing, that Jesus had not identified himself to the invalid prior to healing him. Jesus had stepped up, spoken to him, healed him, and stepped away into the crowd, which at festivals was thick. Shortly afterward Jesus did speak to the healed man again in the temple grounds, and warned him not to sin anymore, lest there be worse consequences than being an invalid. We've no idea of what Jesus perceived about the man and his past, but he might well warn any of us in a similar way. For whatever reason, the man went from speaking with Jesus at the temple to speaking of Jesus to his adversaries, which gave them more reasons to attack the Lord. Jesus asserted that he was working just as the Father always works, every day, Sabbath or not. God stopped doing the work of creating on the Sabbath, but he didn't cease his care-taking of the cosmos, including humanity. Jesus' Jewish adversaries understood his words to mean he was equal with God, and they were correct.

Jesus made a grand statement of his divine authority as the Son of God and Son of Man in 5:19-29. He has the power of life and death, forever. He can (and does and will) bring the dead to life, both by spiritual life in the new birth and eternal life in the resurrection. This theme will be revisited especially in conversations with Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, in chapter 11. Note here what Jesus says about receiving eternal life by hearing and believing in 5:24, that's the transformation from death to life; and what he says about the resurrection in 5:25-29, that everyone who dies in the flesh will be raised at the same time to face judgment at the same time, righteous and wicked. Those who have done good, the same as those who hear and believe, will rise to life, while those who have not obeyed the master's voice but rather done evil will rise in obedience to the same divine command to face condemnation in judgment. This theme is consistent with the message of John 3:16-21.

A persistent theme in John is that of witnesses who testify of Jesus. We've had John as witness already, and are reminded of that testimony in 6:33, bright and intense, but brief; then there is the testimony of Jesus' works (v36) such as the healing of the invalid that sparked this debate with

some unhappy Jews, but the works certainly testified of Jesus' authority; and then too there is the testimony of the Scriptures (v39-40) which anticipated Jesus coming, his works, his words. It's unfortunate when people are diligent about scrutinizing the scriptures (5:39), thinking they'll obtain eternal life, but never learn to love the Lord whose words they read, nor to love their fellow humans as God does. There was no reason for Jesus to condemn his adversaries, they were already condemned by the very words of Moses whom they idolized, putting their hope in him while missing the spirit of his words. To believe the Law of Moses leads to believing in Jesus, because Moses "wrote of me." The Bible presents a unified story of God's work leading from creation to Christ. Knowing all of it is helpful, accepting the message of divine love and redemption is crucial.

## Matthew 12

The account of Jesus's disciples plucking grain to eat on the Sabbath and Jesus healing the man in the synagogue on the Sabbath are found in Matthew 12:1-4 and Mark 2:23-3:6 and Luke 6:1-11, with some variations of details included.

Jesus connected David's need for food in 1 Samuel 21 to the disciples hunger on the Sabbath. That suggests Jesus and his disciples had a relationship with the rulers of their people analogous to the relationship David had with Saul, with the critics being in the role of Saul who opposed and tried to kill David. Jesus also made a point from Hosea 6:6 (I desire mercy, not sacrifice) about the importance of understanding the meaning of God's commands, and not just enforcing ritual rules. Jesus by analogy put himself and his disciples in the role of priests serving in the temple, which happened every day, including the Sabbath. He also asserted that what was happening there with him is "greater than the temple" which was true but would have compounded the offence in the eyes of the critics. A few paragraphs later Jesus asserted that something "greater than Jonah" and "greater than Solomon" was there. These are audacious claims Jesus was making, and the unbelievers, just like King Saul, felt threatened and pursued his destruction.

The Sabbath confrontation continued into the synagogue where a man with a withered hand was in the assembly. Jesus then challenged the other Jews whether it was right to heal on the Sabbath. He made the point that any of them would rescue a trapped animal on the Sabbath, and humans

have far greater value than animals. (This is one of several times that the side point is made, animals have value in God's eyes, and humans have greater intrinsic value than any animal.) Jesus taught by word and deed that Sabbath regulation was never intended to prevent helping the helpless, doing good on the Sabbath. Mercy before sacrifice.

In Matthew 12:15-21 we have Jesus continuing his work in more remote locations because of growing hostility among the Jewish leaders. He warned people he helped not to talk about him, for the same reason he demurred when his mother asked for assistance in John 2, the timing and location had to be right for his presentation as the sacrifice of redemption. Matthew's citation of Isaiah 42:1-4 (from the Greek Septuagint version) affirms Jesus as God's chosen servant, led by God's Spirit, whose name offers hope to the nations/gentiles. His victory rested on his submission, not taking up arms.

Demon possession or oppression had/has different symptoms in different people. The demoniacs in Matt 8:28 ff were irrational, violent, and incredibly strong under the influence, whereas the possessed man in 12:22 was blind and mute. Whatever the symptoms, Jesus had authority over all.

The Pharisees responded to Jesus' signs and wonders by attributing the obviously real miracles to Beelzebub, a Canaanite deity (see 2 Kings 1:2), a pseudonym for the devil. Jesus rejected that reasoning, asserting that Satan was not at war against himself, noting that there were accepted exorcists among them, and affirming that it was the Spirit of God who empowered himself. The parable of the strong man and stronger man in 12:29 describes how Jesus intended to defeat Satan in his own stronghold, through death, and free those subject to slavery because of sin and death. The "blasphemy against the Spirit" surely refers to the very behavior the Pharisees were exhibiting, refusing to accept the truth no matter how plain it may be.

Notice how important casual words are, what they reveal and their consequences in 12:33-37.

Asking Jesus for a sign(12:38) seems absurd, given all that he'd been doing. Those doubters were unlikely to believe and follow no matter what they saw. Jesus' reference to Jonah no doubt looked ahead to his own suffering, death, burial and resurrection, but also reflected on the attitude

that led Jonah into being in the belly of the great fish, which they were displaying. To know God's will and refuse to do it. Notice again that in 12:6 Jesus claimed to be greater than the temple, and in v41-42 he claims to be greater than Jonah and greater than Solomon.

The warning in 12:43-45 isn't just a mundane observation about evil spirits. It's a commentary on the times, that through John and then Jesus the devil and his allies were being defeated on every side, but unless they took hold of that victory their end would be worse than their beginning. The Romans who ruled over them would in fact come in force and overwhelm them and displace them.

This segment of Matthew concludes with a brief teaching from Jesus that his disciples compose his real family. He didn't disparage his mother or his skeptical brothers, but he affirmed the more important bond with those who do the Father's will. A principle for the church through the ages.

### Mark 3

When Mark told the same story that Matthew has in 12:9-14, Mark emphasized the hostility, the trap laid by those who opposed Jesus. In Jesus grief over their stubbornness, we have the rare event of Jesus being described as angry (3:5). One thing that can anger our Lord is being hard hearted about the suffering of others.

The Pharisees and Herodians would have been arch-rivals on almost every political issue, but they could agree to cooperate against Jesus (3:6).

The breadth of Jesus' ministry and of those with needs who sought him out is emphasized in 3:7-12.

The selection of 12 apostles from the larger group of disciples is given in Mark 3:13-19, and Matthew 10, and Luke 6:14-16. Twelve at least in part because he was resetting the kingdom of priests, the covenant family of God. Israel grew out of the 12 patriarchs, and the church would grow out of the 12 apostles. Judas Iscariot is almost always mentioned as the one "who betrayed him." Simon the Zealot would have been an advocate of the violent overthrow of the Romans before he became a disciple of Jesus. He and Matthew (the tax collector) would have been enemies apart from Jesus. It's ironic that Pharisees and Herodians could come together in

hostility against Jesus, and tax collectors and zealots could come together in discipleship.

Mark 3:20-34 gives some contextual details not included by Matthew. The setting in a house, probably Peter's house in Capernaum, the crowd that disrupted even being able to have a meal, the skeptical reaction of Jesus' family, thinking things had gotten out of control. This snippet in v21 along with some comments in John 7 indicate that Jesus had to give up the comfort of his family who didn't share his insight into his purpose. Those must have been hard and confusing days for Mary with even her own sons and daughters at odds with her firstborn.

## Luke 6

In Luke 6:12 we have the prelude to Jesus appointing the 12, that he spent the whole night in prayer to God. He was doing something momentous, and divine approval and assistance were of the utmost importance. We could all be blessed by a night in prayer from time to time.

Luke gives us the term for the 12 in v13, apostles, which means delegates, messengers, ambassadors, authorized representatives. The term "apostle" basically means "one sent."

Judas Iscariot in Luke's words, "became a traitor." He was a disciple, he became a traitor.

Luke 6:20-49 recounts a "sermon" Jesus gave after choosing the 12, on a level place. There are several similar teachings to the "sermon on the mount" in Matthew 5-7, but this isn't necessarily the same time and place. Every teacher repeats some things, and teaches similar ideas in different times and places.

Notice that the message to the oppressed in Jesus' speech is directed to his disciples, and uses the pronoun "you" persistently. The beatitudes of Matthew 5:2-10 address principles of the kingdom, while those of Luke 6:20-26 speak directly to "you" who are disciples of Jesus in various trials and struggles (and temptations) of this life. Love, and mercy, even to those who seem undeserving is stressed. Trust in God enables generosity in both attitude and behavior.

Our aim is to be like Jesus (6:40) and capable of helping our fellow disciples. A heart filled with dedication to Jesus and his words will produce good works and good words to bless others. Jesus, through his words, is that rock on which a durable life can be built, able to withstand every stress.

Matthew 5-7, the “sermon on the mount”

Matthew includes 5 of Jesus’ discourses, Matthew 5-7, 10, 13, 18, and 24-25, each of which takes just a few minutes to read.

Matthew 5-7 is basically the King’s description of kingdom living. It is of course rooted in God’s word in the Old Testament, explaining and applying the principles of God’s covenant teaching for disciples of Jesus in his kingdom.

Note v3 and v10, “... theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” That’s the theme of the principles in chapters 5-7.

Jesus did not set aside or destroy the Old Testament, he finished its purpose and met its requirements and every principle of the Law and Prophets is for the training of citizens of the kingdom of heaven (5:17-19).

Jesus’ taught very difficult principles for his disciples to follow, as fundamental to kingdom life, and personally demonstrated every one of them. He experienced the slander of v11, and rejoiced in doing God’s will. It is not “natural” in sinful flesh to forgive as he commanded, to turn the other cheek as he commanded, to turn away from lust as he commanded, to love as God loves.

Remember when reading Jesus’ words in Matthew 5-7 that he stressed these instructions were for living in his kingdom, and that Matthew wrote these things after the church was established in order for Christians to understand the Lord’s will. This is what pursuit of the kingdom is all about, Matthew 6:33. “These words” of Jesus (7:24) are to be heard and practiced.

Matthew 9

“His own city...” Capernaum.

v9, “When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.” Recall Exodus 14:31, when Israel saw what God did at the Red Sea and feared the LORD and believed in God and in Moses.

Matthew – in 10:3 Matthew labels himself “Matthew the tax collector,” an ignominious title. In Mark 3:18 and Luke 6:15 he is just Matthew. Matthew did not forget or hide from whence he came when the Lord called him. He knew the condemnation of himself and his friends pictured in 9:11. Jesus in v12 was not saying the Pharisees with their haughty prejudices were righteous (recall Matthew 5:20). Jesus knew full well what Paul later wrote in Romans 3:23, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The Pharisees were willfully oblivious, but needed the great physician just as much as the tax collectors and other obvious sinners.

Luke’s account of Matthew’s feast (Luke 5:27ff) emphasizes the extravagance of Matthew’s meal, while Matthew’s own account focuses on the message Jesus sent.

Twice in Matthew, 9:13 and 12:7, Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6. Mercy is one of the greater, weightier, commandments of God, Matthew 23:23, rather than technical ritual observances.

Fasting, v14-17, would be a part of kingdom life (recall 6:16-18) but not for ritual or for show. Rather a genuinely contrite heart communing with the Lord. The rituals of the old ways would not, could not, fit the spiritual new beginning of the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew abridges the story of Jesus and the ruler’s daughter (9:18ff), going straight to the fact she died. The ruler (of the synagogue in Capernaum) most likely would have taken the Pharisees’ attitude of 9:11, but crisis can bring a change of heart, a new outlook. Jesus was his only hope. And so he not only asked, he “knelt before him.” The interruption of the woman with the bleeding disorder, an illness that probably left her perpetually sickly and weak, as well as ceremonially unclean with numerous social issues, was probably hard for the ruler to put up with, having a sense of urgency to get Jesus to his home. Nevertheless, the Lord can do everything in his time.

The “fringe” of Jesus’ garment (9:20) is what’s referred to in Numbers

15:38-39, the blue tassels that reminded Israel of all God's commandments, and reminded them to obey the Lord. The same blue tassels come up again in Matthew 14:36 and 23:5. Jesus wore them honestly, the One who truly remembered, understood, and obeyed the royal commandments of God.

"Your faith has made you well." Again, Matthew abridged the interaction Jesus had with the woman, emphasizing that her faith was key, and Jesus was willing and glad for her to be healed.

Jesus' authority surpassed the power of death, as demonstrated here, and even more thoroughly later with his own death and resurrection.

On the one hand, when Matthew and the other gospel writers tell us that people went out and told lots of people what Jesus had done for them (9:31, 26), we see that is a natural inclination, to share good news (gospel=good news). The inclination to share good news (the gospel) is generally a positive. We too should want to tell people what Jesus has done for us. Yet, at the same time, we see people who have been blessed by Jesus turning around and following their own heart and not obeying the Lord. They didn't understand the effect they were having on the flow of events leading toward Jesus' suffering, but he did. His warnings often fell on "deaf" ears but he had good reasons for giving those instructions.

Again in Matthew 9:32-34 we see that demon oppression affected different people in different ways. And we have a glimpse of the rationalizations of the Pharisees that come around again in 12:24.

The abundance of opportunity described in Matthew 9:35-38 evokes recollection of several historical and prophetic foreshadows. Seeing the crowds as Jesus saw them (v36) echoes Moses in Numbers 27:17, knowing that he personally could not continue to lead Israel, because his death was imminent. See also Ezekiel 34:5-15. The religious leaders had failed the flock, like old king Ahab (see 1 Kings 22:17).

Jesus told his disciples to pray for workers in the harvest, and then proceeded to choose 12 of them and send them out to work in the next sentence, chapter 10. When praying to God for things to be done, be willing to share in the work.

## Luke 7

The centurion in Luke 7:1-10 was remarkable, probably similar to Cornelius in Acts 10. A man of good character whose faith in God was evident, even to the Jewish leaders of Capernaum. Not a proselyte, but a gentile believer. Notice that the elders of the Jews said “he is worthy” while the centurion himself said, “I am not worthy.” His comprehension and his faith was marvel to the Lord, and highly commended by him.

While all of Jesus’ miracles were signs affirming his divine authority and mission, miracles were also motivated by kindness and mercy, as in 7:13. Notice again that when Jesus did deeds of great power the people feared (7:16) and God was glorified.

v18-35; John the Baptist had been imprisoned by Herod Antipas, across the Jordan in a fortress called Machaerus (the location was recorded by Josephus). He had already identified Jesus as the Lamb of God, and the bridegroom, and yet he himself functioned as an “old testament” prophet, who didn’t necessarily understand the import of his own message (1 Peter 1:10-11). John could not be expected to understand how Jesus would fulfill the purposes of God’s anointed, through suffering and death, and so like other Jews of his generation, including Jesus’ own family and his own apostles, John in prison, hearing bits and pieces of Jesus’ works and words, was confused about the direction Jesus’ ministry was going. And so he inquired through messengers. Jesus’ answer through John’s disciples was to work miracles before their eyes and send the messengers back with that testimony, “go tell John what you have seen and heard.”

The statement in 7:30 is especially noteworthy. God had a purpose for the Pharisees which did not come about, because they refused it by rejecting his messenger. Every one of us can choose to embrace or reject God’s purpose for ourselves.

The irony of 7:31-35, John and Jesus worked in very different ways, and those who rejected them both were inherently hypocritical and inconsistent in their reasoning, basically showing that they couldn’t be persuaded by anyone or any means to truly turn to God.

The irony continues in the account of Simon the Pharisee in 7:36-49. The man deemed himself righteous, but clearly was not hospitable toward

Jesus, his guest. The social faux pas of no welcoming greeting or foot washing (v44-46) were insults to his guest, but the woman of bad reputation stepped in like Abraham welcoming the angels in Genesis 18. The real problem wasn't that the woman had more sin, though that seemed evident to Simon and even to the woman, the real problem was that Simon didn't think he needed Jesus to forgive him. Once again, in Jesus' words, "your faith has saved you, go in peace." That's what we all need to hear and be assured of.

## Matthew 11

Matthew 11:1 refers back to the instructions in chapter 10 Jesus that gave to his apostles when he first sent them out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Jesus himself continued to travel about, preaching and teaching.

Matthew 11:2-19 parallels Luke 7:18-35, when John in prison (John the Baptist had been imprisoned by Herod Antipas, across the Jordan in a Herodian fortress called Machaerus, a location recorded by Josephus, where John later was executed), and sent messengers to inquire about Jesus fulfilling the expectations of the Messiah. Like his forbears among the prophets, and his contemporary Jews, John didn't altogether understand the nature of the imminent kingdom nor how the Christ was to accomplish his mission. John didn't have to understand the Lord's unfolding mystery any more than Isaiah did to faithfully speak God's truth.

Jesus demonstrated that he was the one foretold by the prophets by doing the works of the Servant of God (see Isaiah 35:5-8, for example).

The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John (11:11), because... Hebrews 1:1-4, God has now spoken by his Son ... and Hebrews 2:2-4 we have a great salvation declared by the Lord and affirmed by eye witnesses and signs and wonders and ... Hebrews 10:19-22 in the Kingdom we have priestly access to the throne of God everywhere and all the time by the blood of Jesus. What John aspired to, looking forward to the kingdom, has been made available in Christ (note Hebrews 11:40, anticipation of being made perfect, and 12:23, achievement). The book of Hebrews directly clarifies Matthew 11:11.

There is some uncertainty about Jesus' meaning in 11:12, but consider

his own assertion a few verses earlier in Matthew 10:34-39, that to follow him would mean being the target of violence and suffering persecution. There was violent opposition to the kingdom, John the prophet was already in prison and his death was imminent. Jesus was already the target of plots and schemes to undermine his message and kill him. The temple was in the hands of a corrupt and greedy family of “priests.” Comparing John to Elijah in 11:14 should remind us of the hostility Elijah faced from the ruling house of Ahab and Jezebel and the majority willingness of Israel to follow other gods rather than the LORD.

11:20, “Then he began to denounce...” A turning point in Jesus’ ministry had come. Those who knew of his works and his teaching but rejected him anyway would face horrible consequences. The towns of the Galilee where he spent most of his time and did many miracles were denounced just as the prophets had denounced the pagan cities of Babylon, Egypt, Tyre, Assyria, and so forth, going “down to Hades.” Those who put their trust in the Lord are not among those who are “brought down” but rather those who are “lifted up” (Psalm 30:3, 40:2, etc). God’s judgment is tempered by his knowledge of our lives and opportunities (11:24), he is a righteous judge without prejudice.

Note that Jesus characterized his disciples as “little children” and not “wise and understanding” in 11:25. Other verses amplify what Jesus meant, in contrasting what the Lord values and what the world pursues. See James 3:13-18, for example.

Like John 14:6-7, Jesus asserted here that he is the only avenue to knowing the Father, Matthew 11:27, and he invited everyone to come and receive God’s rest in him. This language in v28 is pertinent to the context of Matthew 12:1-14 and the conflict over Sabbath observance. When Jesus said in 12:8 that he, the Son of Man, is Lord of the Sabbath, that’s directly related to the invitation in 11:27-30. To work with Christ, sharing his yoke, is to enter into the Sabbath rest of God.

## Luke 11

Among the items Jesus taught his disciples to pray for in Matthew 6:9-13 and again in Luke 11:2-4 we have glory to God the Father, yearning for the kingdom, daily necessities, forgiveness consistent with our own behavior, and help to escape testing. Remembering that both Matthew and

Luke wrote their gospels after the Lord had ascended into heaven and the church brought into being, perhaps we should consider the import of praying “your kingdom come.”

On the one hand, the kingdom of Christ is already here, he reigns and has all authority in heaven and on earth (see Revelation 1:6, 9, 5:10; Colossians 1:13, 4:11), and at the same time the fulness of being in the kingdom is a goal of Christian living, and inheritance to come when Jesus returns on the clouds (see 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Timothy 4:1, 18; James 2:5; 2 Peter 1:11). We participate in the kingdom while in this world, and at the same time pray for its fulness in future glory.

Boldness and persistence in prayer are taught in Luke 11:5-13, similar to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:7-11. Notice that in the broad teaching in Matthew 7:11 we have “how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” while in the specific instance in Luke 11:13 we have the best of heavenly gifts for those who ask, “how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” See Acts 2:37-38; 22:16 for ideas of how we might ask the Father to give us the Holy Spirit.

The implication in Luke 11:14ff as in Matthew 12:22ff is that the devil has some primacy over demons. We know very little about the origins of demons/unclean spirits, but can surmise that they are a distorted part of what God created, that they are spirits without bodies that long for bodies, and that in their nature they have something in common with the devil, called Beelzebub here, from 2 Kings 1. If the Satan (adversary) is arch-demon (archon=prince), then he and demons must have some measure of shared nature.

When Matthew described the same encounter we have in Luke 11:14ff, he cited Jesus rhetorically asking, “if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons...” while Luke wrote Jesus’ words this way, “if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons...” Understanding that both statements faithfully portray Jesus’ words that day, we can see a connection in Jesus’ vocabulary to the Exodus, pharaoh’s magicians having falsely misrepresented the works of God finally admitting it was “the finger of God” that worked the wonders (Exodus 8:19) and knowing it was “the finger of God” that wrote the covenant commandments on the stone tablets (Exodus 31:18, Deuteronomy 9:10), Jesus was aggressively challenging his

opponents to stop opposing God's work and word, to not be hard hearted like pharaoh, and at the same time with Matthew's language we have a glimpse of the work of the Spirit in the Exodus events. Only the Spirit of God can give life, even to bugs. The conflict between those who hear and obey and those who don't listen or obey is highlighted in the exchange of Luke 11:27-28.

Words aren't very helpful if people won't listen (v28) and light isn't very helpful if people shut it out, shut their eyes. Jesus is the lamp lighting the world. Some of his critics wanted more proof (v29; like pharaoh in Exodus, the finger of God in v20). By refusing to see Jesus' light, his critics were choosing to be full of darkness.

The darkness warned of in v33-36 is ironically highlighted in the expectations of the Pharisee in 11:37ff. The Pharisee "was astonished that" Jesus didn't ceremonially rinse his hands before eating. That ceremony of hand washing (remember the big jars of water in John 2), not really to get clean, but as a ritual, had become a binding tradition among the Pharisees, a token of godliness in their eyes, but not mandated or even suggested in the Law of Moses. The ensuing critique of the Pharisees, and then the inclusion of the interpreters of the Law, in 11:39-52 has much in common with his later message to the Pharisees and Scribes at the temple in Matthew 23. Superficial religious ritual, without hearts given to mercy, love, and justice, amounted to superficially clean and sparkling exteriors but death and decay inside. The warning of v51, "this generation," is pertinent to the doom of Roman destruction hanging over Jerusalem if they would not repent and accept the Wisdom of God in the person of Jesus Christ. The reaction though was ever increasing efforts to derail Jesus by entrapment, or any means possible.

## Matthew 13

Matthew 13 is Jesus' 3<sup>rd</sup> discourse of the 5 the apostle recorded. The first was chapters 5-7, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Matthew 10. This discourse is a series of parables, generally about the nature of the kingdom of heaven.

The word "parable" is brought across into English from Greek. The word meant "to lay one thing beside another," the idea of using something familiar to illustrate and clarify something new or unfamiliar.

The parables in Matthew 13 are set in the same day as the events of Matthew 12:22ff, with Jesus exiting “the house” at Capernaum and going down to the water a short distance away.

When Jesus told these parables, he was speaking to a crowd, not specifically to his disciples as in Matthew 5-7 and Matthew 10.

As he often does, Matthew points out prophetic fulfillment in Jesus’ words and deeds, v14ff, v35. These parables highlight the growth of the kingdom of heaven in this age, amidst opposition, and the culmination of the kingdom when Jesus comes again.

Notice v24, “his field.” Then at the conclusion, when Jesus went back into the house (v36), the interpretation indicates “his field” (v38) is the world. These parables presume the victory over the devil alluded to in Matthew 12:28-29, so that the Son of Man can claim the whole world as “his field.” The “sons of the evil one” (v38) are to be removed from the kingdom, which is over the whole world, and not the “sons of the kingdom” who remain in the kingdom.

The theme of separation of the righteous and the wicked at judgement, when Jesus returns, recurs in the parables of the weeds and of the net.

Matthew 13:51-52 highlights the value of knowing the Old Testament Scriptures in the kingdom of heaven, seeing the Son of Man and his kingdom in the entirety of scripture and bringing out treasure from that great repository of God’s will.

Matthew 13:53-58 highlights a visit to Nazareth, where the people were not receptive to his authoritative teaching and power. Apparently his life in Nazareth had looked pretty ordinary to them. They had seen him as a child and young man, and weren’t willing to embrace what he had apparently suddenly become.

Luke 8

Luke 8 continues Jesus’ ministry in Galilee.

Note that while Matthew usually refers to “the kingdom of heaven,” Luke usually describes the same thing as “the kingdom of God.” The terms are

synonyms, with slightly different emphasis perhaps with a consideration for different original audiences.

Luke often highlighted women in his writing, Luke and Acts, and their contributions to the Lord's work. Here in 8:2-3 a few of Jesus' female disciples are named, certainly setting him apart from traditional Jewish teachers of that generation, and the means of his support in his itinerant preaching. Jesus' (and the twelve's) means of support here, voluntary contribution from his disciples, continued to be the means of support of his work in the church, from Acts 2 onward.

Note the conclusion of the meaning of the parable of the sower in Luke 8:15. When all is said and done, that's the point. Be that person who takes the Lord's word into the heart and acts upon it with integrity and patience.

What will we do with the light that is Christ and his word (v16-18)? Hold him and his truth up high to illuminate our lives? "How you hear" (v8, 18) is the difference between the hearing that becomes obedience and the hearing that isn't genuine listening or following. The one is an investment that grows by God's grace, the other is a squandering of opportunity resulting in loss of everything. v21 emphasizes the same.

Jesus authority over wind and wave in Luke 8:22-25 is paralleled in Matthew 8:23-27 and Mark 4:36-41. All three writers note the reaction of the disciples, astonished and afraid when they saw such power displayed. Not an answer to prayer, but a spoken word of rebuke. "Who then is this...?" That's the question we all have to answer correctly.

The account of healing the demoniac in 8:26-37 is also found in Matthew 8:28-34 and Mark 5:1-20, with some different details noted in each account. This event occurred in the Roman Decapolis, an area mostly populated by gentiles. The title describing Jesus, "Son of the Most High God" reflects the non-Israelite heritage of the man afflicted by demons. "God Most High" was the name used by Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18-20.

When Jesus calmed the storm the disciples were afraid (8:25) and when the inhabitants saw the outcome of Jesus calming the man (8:35) they too were afraid (8:37), but the outcomes in the two instances were quite different.

We can only guess that when the apostles later understood the gospel is for everyone, the groundwork done by this man in 8:39 would have paved the way for open doors of opportunity in that region.

A detail Luke included about the dying/dead girl and the bleeding woman in 8:42-43 is the coincidence of 12 years. Luke strongly emphasized the hesitance of the woman to be noticed, and Jesus' insistence that she come forward.

## Mark 4-5

Mark 4:1-20, the parable of the sower, is paralleled in Matthew 13:1-23 and Luke 8:4-15. Note that Mark mentions the setting of the explanation of the parable in 4:10, "alone... the Twelve and the others..." It's worth noting that the inner circle included more than the Twelve.

The parable of the seed in Mark 4:26-29 is only in Mark. The processes of seeds sprouting and growing are not seen, and beyond our power. So also with the seed that is the word of God. We don't see the inner working of the word, it isn't our job or ability to make it sprout and grow, just to participate in the planting and harvesting. Planting will lead to harvesting. The inner working is in the hands of God.

Mark 4:30-32 are paralleled in Matthew 13:31-32 and Luke 13:18-19.

Mark 4:35-41, when Jesus calmed the storm, is paralleled in Matthew 8:18, 23-27 and Luke 8:22-25. Only Mark includes the detail that there were other boats with Jesus (4:36).

The healing of the man in the tombs dominated by unclean spirits (5:1-20) is also in Matthew 8:28-34, Luke 8:26-39. Matthew mentioned two men, while Mark and Luke both singled out the individual who wanted to follow Jesus afterward. Matthew mentioned the question, "have you come to torment us before the time?" Suggesting the unclean spirits know there is a judgment ahead, but not yet. Mark said the spokesman asserted "I adjure you by God, do not torment me." Again, suggesting a right admitted by God to move in this world. And Luke wrote that "they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss" which appears to be an abode of spirits separated from this world, mentioned in Romans 10:7 and Revelation 9:1-2, 9:11, 11:7, 17:8, and 20:1-3. In the Greek Old Testament the abyss is generally the watery deep, as in Genesis 1:2, 7:11, 8:2 which

becomes a symbolic term for the dreaded realm of spirits in Jonah 2:6, Psalms 35:7, Job 28:14, Ezekiel 31:15. It is ironic that the legion of spirits requested escape from the abyss/deep and then plummeted down the slope onto the waters and drowned. These spirits were a host of enemies inflicting harm on the innocent, and the rushing of 2,000 pigs headlong into the sea (Mark 5:13) ought to remind us of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt in Exodus 14-15.

The healing of Jairus's daughter and the bleeding woman in Mark 5:22-43 is paralleled in Luke 8:40-56 and Matthew 9:18-26. That fact that Mark/Peter remembered and shared Jairus's name suggests that he continued as a disciple of Jesus and was known among the Christians.

Mark occasionally includes an Aramaic term (Mark 5:41) with a translation, as does John a few times, indicating both the recollection of the witness and the non-Hebrew audience for the writing.

## Matthew 10

This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the five discourses of Jesus recorded by Matthew.

Consider the authority Jesus gave his chosen apostles in v1. Consider that Judas Iscariot who betrayed him participated in these things, and yet he still betrayed the Lord.

Notice that Matthew calls himself "the tax collector".

This assignment, only to people of definite Israelite heritage, was a training ground for the apostles, but also a call to the kingdom (v7) for all those communities they visited. The Jewish nation was running out of time (note v23, 16:28,23:36). The Christ would reign, and if those who had the words of God would not enter the kingdom, they would suffer the consequences in that generation.

The expectation the apostles were to have was that godly people would provide for them when they were doing God's work (v9-11). Their work had serious consequences, one way or another (v14-15).

v16-23 refers to immediate experiences the apostles would have, but also the whole of their experiences as Jesus' ambassadors to the world.

This immediate assignment to the lost sheep of Israel (v6, 9:36) would flow into the work of taking the message to the nations (notice the kings and governors and Gentiles in v18) as seen in the book of Acts.

The message in v26-31 is “have no fear of them... do not fear... rather fear him (God)... fear not, therefore...” Every creature has value in God’s sight, but none more than his own children.

v21ff and v34ff allude to Micah 7:6, the hostility that many will/d0 have toward the followers of Jesus. Jesus’ disciples must give up everything in favor of following him, even our own life.

The assurance of v40-42 is that God rewards the widow who shows hospitality to Elijah just as if she herself were the Lord’s prophet. Whatever any of us has, great or small, is what the Lord wants us to share for his glory.

Matthew 14

Matthew 14:1-12 is paralleled in Mark 6:14-29

Why was it not lawful for Herod Antipas to have Herodias as his wife? She had been married to Herod’s brother, Herod Philip, and that incestuous relationship was flatly forbidden in the Law (Leviticus 18:16, 20:21).

Note that John had been saying this “to” Herod, v4, not about Herod.

Josephus also reported the legalized murder of John the Baptist by Herod, and recorded that the name of Herodias’s daughter was Salome.

Among the lessons of the story is yet another affirmation of the folly of rash oaths.

Matthew 14:13-21 is paralleled in Mark 6:32-44, Luke 9:10-17, and John 6:1-13. Matthew mentions “grass” to sit on (v19), Mark adds that it was “green grass” (Mark 6:39) and John notes that it was nearly Passover (John 6:4), which is generally about the beginning of April. The accounts together round out a picture of the green grass of early spring, and large crowds of people en route to Passover but curious about Jesus.

Matthew connects the news of John's death with Jesus' withdrawal to a remote place, Mark and Luke mention the return of the 12 from their first preaching and healing mission. Couple those things with Passover and it was a time of great stress in many ways, very challenging for Jesus.

Producing the abundance of bread and fish for the multitude again showed that Jesus has the power of the creator. He fulfills the many promises of abundance God gave his people in the Old Testament.

They all ate and were satisfied, the leftovers exceeded the original supply, and nothing was wasted. All of these are divine principles. And there is an over-the-top fulfillment of a prophetic ante-type in Elisha (2 Kings 4:42-44).

Matthew 14:22-33 is paralleled in Mark 6:45-51, John 6:16-21.

"Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat..." (ESV, 14:22). Several times the language of Matthew and of Mark dramatizes the pace and urgency of Jesus' ministry, rushing toward its climax in Jerusalem.

Jesus again demonstrated his complete control of even the unstable and shifting waters by walking on the surface, even with waves rolling around him. Peter, in his loss of faith/confidence cried out to the Lord and was heard... by the Lord right at hand (Psalm 18:16).

Jesus' disciples "worshiped him" (14:33). And he accepted it, without rebuke, because he is in fact the Son of God and worthy of worship.

Matthew 14:34-36 is paralleled in Mark 6:53-56.

The "fringe of his garment" in 14:36 is the same as that in 9:20 and Numbers 15:38-39.

No healings were too hard for Jesus.

Mark 6

Mark 6:1-6 is paralleled in Matthew 13:54-58

The folks in Nazareth thought they knew too much about Jesus as an

ordinary child and man in the neighborhood to consider him as anything more, despite the evidence of his wisdom and his power. They wouldn't move past their preconceptions... and Jesus "was amazed at their lack of faith." It was very disappointing that people he knew face to face wouldn't listen to his message, to their great loss.

Mark 6:7-11 is paralleled in Matthew 10:1, 9-14 and Luke 9:1, 3-5.

The brief instructions in v8-11 emphasized trusting God for their needs, generally provided through the hospitality of godly people.

Note that they preached "that people should repent" (Mark 6:12) or "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 10:7). Apparently the coming kingdom called for repenting... and still does.

Mark noted the 12 were sent 2 by 2. Perhaps for "the testimony of 2 witnesses." Perhaps for mutual encouragement. Perhaps because "two are better than one."

Mark 6:14-29 is paralleled in Matthew 14:1-2 and Luke 9:7-9.

People had pieces of the story of the Christ from the prophets, but weren't putting it all together successfully. Thinking Jesus was John raised from the dead suggested they anticipated some sort of dying and rising, and miracles, but it was confused.

Herod's reaction to John (Mark 6:20) has recurred many times. He feared, he was puzzled, he was fascinated. See Felix, Acts 24:24-27.

The feeding of the 5,000 is found in Mark 6:32ff, Matthew 14:13ff, Luke 9:10ff, and John 6:5ff. Mark and Luke particularly note the return of the 12 in connection with the effort to withdraw to a quiet place. But the withdrawal was largely in vain, as people sought Jesus out.

Note the motivation for the miracle(s) and message(s) in Mark 6:34.

The disciples had just returned from a preaching and miracles tour, depending on God for their daily needs. Yet when Jesus suggested feeding the crowd they were flummoxed, "That would take more than half a year's wages!" they said.

Mark's "green grass" dovetails with John's "the Passover was at hand."

Jesus took, blessed, broke, and gave. This is a repeated pattern.

The process was miraculous, but organized. The road weary disciples were called upon to serve the multitude.

Mark 6:45ff is paralleled in Matthew 14:22ff, and 45-51 in John 6:15-21.

Jesus was willing to let the disciples struggle to make headway (6:48), perhaps because it was therapeutic for them. But they saw him on the water, and he came aboard, calming both the men and the wind and waves.

Notice the description of the disciples reactions in Mark 6:51-52. There is not glossing over how hard it was for them to "get it." Notwithstanding, fear, astonishment, lack of understanding, and hard hearts, they were his disciples.

## Luke 9

Portions of Luke 9 are paralleled in Mathew 10, Matthew 14, and Mark 6. Then a segment, Luke 9:18ff is paralleled in Matthew 16:13ff and Mark 8:27ff, and Luke 9:28ff parallels Matthew 17:1ff and Mark 9:2ff.

While the Jewish community was confused about Jesus' identity (Luke 9:18-19), the disciples had sorted that out (v20), though they definitely did not understand the task that lay before him yet, as outlined in v21-22.

Nothing matters more in this world than following Jesus, v23-27. Jesus, the Son of Man, will come again in glory, and a major achievement achieving that glory was the imminent coming of the kingdom of God, in that generation.

About 8 days after the profession of Jesus being the Son of God, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on "the mountain" to pray. If that is the same mountain where the profession of faith was made in v20, then it was Mt Hermon, the highest mountain in the region (since Matthew 16:13 places Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, on the slopes of Mt

Hermon).

Luke 9:29-30 was a foretaste of 9:26, with a focus on 9:22. The two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, are effectively “the Law and the Prophets” and both left this world in unique circumstances. Peter, James and John “saw his glory” and though James was the first of the apostles to die for the Lord, Peter and John both wrote of the glory they had seen on the mountain.

The overshadowing cloud and voice remind us, among other things of Mt Sinai in Exodus 19-20. When Jesus is identified as God’s “chosen” it echoes Aaron in Numbers 16:7 and Jerusalem in Deuteronomy 12:5 and the nation of Israel in 1 Kings 3:8.

The spirit that seized the boy in Luke 9:37-43 reminds me of the spirit that plagued king Saul, with intermittent frenzies and distress. It is called “a spirit” and “the demon” and “the unclean spirit” in this story. Though some of the disciples had recently healed people, including casting out unclean spirits (9:6, 10), none of the disciples in the group Jesus approached could cast out this one. When Jesus did “all were astonished at the majesty of God.”

In the midst of praise and good will Jesus again emphatically warned his disciples of the rejection that lay ahead, v43-45, which they did not understand, really could not yet understand.

In the midst of these things, the confession of Jesus, the hesitation about feeding the 5,000, the transfiguration and divine pronouncement there, the failure to drive out the demon, the disciples were arguing about their own ideas of greatness among themselves (9:46-48). The humble servant, the one who welcomes the insignificant and vulnerable, is the greatest.

Sometimes the Lord’s servants fight battles that don’t need to be fought, to no good purpose, as in 9:49-50. The competitive spirit in v46-47 spilled over from “me versus you” to “us versus them.” Follow the Lord and teach the truth without pointless rancor or competitiveness.

The going toward Jerusalem in 9:51 suggests that Jesus is on his final journey toward that destination, the Passover where he would die.

However, the indication is that there are many steps yet to be taken in his resolute progress toward that goal.

James and John had seen Jesus' glory on the mountain, but they hadn't yet understood who Jesus really is and how his kingdom would be initiated. Thus, like Elijah, they wanted to call down fire from heaven on some Samaritans who didn't want Jesus in the neighborhood. But Jesus rebuked them.

Jesus then and now had no interest in followers of convenience. People who join the crowd or starry eyed disciples. He insists upon real commitment to the journey eyes on the goal, steady work for his cause (9:57-62).

## John 6

Other than the resurrection, the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miraculous sign reported in all 4 gospels. As with previous selected miracles (2:11, 4:54) John described this as "the sign" Jesus had done (6:14).

John connected the crowds seeking Jesus with the proximity of Passover (6:4), the spring pilgrimage holiday at the beginning of barley harvest.

Only John mentioned the detail that the bread was barley loaves. More common and less expensive in Israel than wheat bread. It's an eyewitness detail. It's very possible that the bread of the last supper was also barley loaves.

Only John mentions the Roman name of the Sea of Galilee, Tiberias. It's likely his first audience wasn't familiar with the geography of Israel and of Jerusalem.

The 12 baskets full of leftovers may be more than incidental, given the importance of the number 12 in the founding of Israel and of the church.

The crowd connected Jesus' miraculous sign with the prophet like Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15ff. That was correct, Peter made the same connection (Acts 3:22ff). However, it was also insufficient. True, but not enough.

Passover was an especially tumultuous time for the Jews under Roman rule (recall Matthew 26:5), with spirits and nationalistic fervor running high. It was an especially tempting moment for the kind of movement noted in 6:15, a temptation Jesus resisted, knowing it wasn't the path to his kingdom, not the Father's will.

The crowds that remained after the miracle of the loaves and fishes knew where to look for Jesus, so they followed him to his adopted home town of Capernaum. Jesus chided them for having the wrong priorities, seeking bread more than seeking God's approval, an echo back to the devil's temptation in Matthew 4:4 and the citation of Deuteronomy 8:3.

The "seal" of God in 6:27 surely has reference to the Holy Spirit who had descended upon Jesus at his baptism (John 1:32) and later, from Pentecost onward (Acts 2) was also given as God's seal upon his holy people (consider 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13, 4:30).

John 6:28-29 contrasts their idea of "works" and Jesus affirmation of the one "work" that matters most, to believe in the one God sent into the world. Their question in v30 is patently absurd, since they had sought him out because of the food he provided in the desolate place the day before.

Several times in John we have "I am" statements from Jesus. Here, in v35, it is "I am the bread of life." Only he can satisfy human longings/needs characterized as hunger and thirst.

The principle in v37-39, 44, is one we struggle with, or sometimes dismiss, that God's hand is necessary to give us to Jesus, as Jesus' hand was necessary to give bread to the crowd. The verb in v11 has the same root as the verb in v31-32 and 37-38. God gave bread, God gave Jesus, God gives disciples to Jesus. Clearly, this doesn't displace the response of the disciple, to believe in the one God sent, but the giving is wholly assigned to God, and the keeping is a task Jesus says he will perform. v45 indicates that believing God's teaching (the scriptures) is core to being drawn by God. Trust the Lord!

Jesus had previously claimed to have life in himself (5:21ff), and affirms that again (6:39-40). Also, contrary to opinions of many current evangelical teachers, the time of the resurrection of the faithful is clearly described as

“the last day,” not some secret rendezvous with Jesus leaving a functional world behind.

The idea of “eating” as Jesus spoke of eating his flesh shouldn’t have been completely foreign to the Jews since they had Psalm 34:8, “taste and see that the LORD is good,” alluded to by Peter in 1 Peter 2:2-3.

Jesus directly told his disciples in v63 that what mattered in his words wasn’t the physical body, but the Spirit. By that Spirit Christians participate in the flesh and blood of Jesus each time we gather in his name and share the bread and fruit of the vine of the Lord’s supper, discerning his body (1 Corinthians 11:18ff). The participation isn’t merely food, and not merely ritual, but sharing in the Lord’s body by the Spirit.

Peter’s affirmation in 6:68-69 (when he probably didn’t really yet understand what Jesus was teaching) should be the affirmation of every true believer in Jesus. Even when I don’t “get it” I still believe in Jesus, the Holy One of God, and trust his words of eternal life.

## Matthew 15

There is a remarkable transition from 14:36 to 15:1. Sick people who touched the fringe of his garment (recall Numbers 15:38-39) were healed, and the Pharisees wanted to fuss about ritual hand washing that had become traditional among them. A woman, unclean for 12 years because of chronic bleeding, had touched the fringe and been made whole and clean in 9:20ff. These builders of fences around the Law were oblivious to the obvious, that Jesus made people whole and clean, and manmade rules do not. We should never forget the contrast between “God commanded” and “your tradition” (15:3-4).

Jesus explained his meaning further in v10ff, that what we say and do matters much more for holiness, genuine cleanness before God, that rinsing hands or eating specific foods. The explanation given to Peter (v15-19) didn’t completely gel for him for several years, really not until the Lord sent him to Cornelius in Acts 10.

The sins of the heart in v19 were always more important than the ceremonial laws that set apart Israel from her neighbors, and the penalties

in the Law reflected the distinction. To be ceremonially unclean was a brief inconvenience, to be a murderer or thief was criminal.

When Jesus included adultery and sexual immorality in v19 that's the whole gamut of sinful sexual behavior, for the married and the unmarried. Sexual immorality includes all deviations from the created design of one man and one woman united as one flesh for life.

Tyre and Sidon (v21) had once been strongholds of the wide ranging Phoenician empire. That empire was long gone, and the ancient city Tyre long gone, but the region had been repopulated and there was a lesser city where Tyre had once thrived. The region was part of Canaan as described in Genesis 10:19. There were Jews in the area, but it was primarily Gentile, and primarily Hellenistic (Greek) culture from the days of Alexander's empire. The woman who approached Jesus was of that region and that heritage, not a Jew. Yet she knew who Jesus was, perhaps because of rumors, perhaps in part because of the synagogues in the area. Her persistence, her willingness to humble herself, and especially her faith that prompted both, gave her the outcome she sought.

Seeing Jesus plentiful and astonishing miracles people wondered... and glorified the God of Israel. (v31)

The feeding of the 4,000 seems very similar to the feeding of the 5,000 (15:32ff, 14:13ff). The language of Jesus' disciples in v33 echoes Moses in Numbers 11:21ff when God promised meat for the multitudes of Israel. The Numbers provision of quail (bread and meat) was the 2<sup>nd</sup> time God had done it (recall Exodus 16:12ff), and yet Moses was surprised as though God hadn't done the same thing before. So also with the disciples forgetfulness.

## Mark 7

Mark 6:53-7:23 substantially parallels Matthew 14:34-15:20. Mark (probably reporting Peter's teaching) noted the import of Jesus' words about food in v19, a realization that didn't fully sink in for Peter until Acts 10 when the Lord showed him his will for accepting Gentiles into the family of God, through faith in Jesus.

Mark highlights a reason for Jesus' travel to the area of Tyre and Sidon,

seeking a respite from the constant public interaction, but “he could not be hidden.” The healing of the demon afflicted child, like that of the centurion’s servant, was at a distance, Jesus’ power over illness, or demons, or death itself not being limited by his immediate location.

Having just given a description of Jesus doing a powerful miracle by a word at a distance, Mark next described a miracle in which Jesus took a man aside, and spit, and touched his tongue, and put his fingers in his ears, and looked up to heaven, and sighed, before commanding the man’s healing. There is no obvious reason for Jesus doing those things rather than some simpler or more direct way of healing, but for whatever reason, Jesus saw this as the best way to heal this man. We don’t have to understand the way the Lord works to know that he works.

Note the accolade in v37, the extremely astonished crowds concluded Jesus “has done all things well.” Indeed, he has.

Matthew 16

Matthew 16:1-12 is paralleled in Mark 8:11-21.

The encounter with the Pharisees asking for a sign from heaven probably happened many times in the course of Jesus’ ministry. The episode in 16:1-4 echoes the previous instance in 12:38-42, when Jesus had mentioned the sign of Jonah in response to a request for a sign. Jesus reference to the weather indicates that the world they lived in, the circumstances of the nation among the nations, world events, along with the preaching of John and his own ministry all pointed to the same conclusion, but they insisted on another sign, which wouldn’t have mattered at all.

Showing that we tend to interpret things from our own frame of reference, the misunderstanding of the disciples about leaven and bread in v5-7 is a humorous commentary on human nature. The disciples were bothered about forgetting bread, and because of their own preoccupation they misunderstood Jesus’ reference, imputing their own focus to the Lord, as though he had ever been worried about what’s for lunch.

Matthew 16:13-16 is paralleled in Mark 8:27-29 and Luke 9:18-20.

Caesarea Philippi (v13) is in the territory ruled by Herod Phillip, north of Galilee, on the slopes of Mt Hermon. It is a beautiful verdant region with a vigorous flow of spring water, one of the sources of the Jordan river. It was also site of pagan worship, and had been for centuries. In Jesus' day there were temples and worship sites devoted to Pan and Zeus, in front of and beside a cave from which the waters flowed, presented by the heathen priests as a gateway to the underworld. Those temples and niches with pagan idols were at the base of a great rock face, all of which plays into the language Jesus used in v18.

Notice the highlight of Peter with his surname, Bar-Jonah, son of Jonah, in v17, after a reminder of the sign of Jonah in v4. Peter was going to willingly use the keys of the kingdom to open the door of faith the gentiles, which the original Jonah had tried to avoid. As Jonah had set sail from Joppa to flee from the Lord and avoid going to Nineveh, seat of Assyrian authority, Peter Bar-Jonah would be called from Joppa to go to Cornelius the centurion at the seat of Roman authority in Caesarea.

Various translations have "hell" in v18. The word here is "hades," the abode of the spirits of the dead, not the lake of fire. Again, the pagans of that city believed the cave at the base of the great rock face towering over them was a gateway to hades, the underworld. Jesus here was directly challenging the power of death and doctrines of demons.

The contrast of gates and kingdoms here in 16:16-19 was foreseen in Psalm 9:13-14.

Peter exercised the responsibility and authority Jesus bestowed upon him, the keys of the kingdom, in Acts 1 when he took the lead under the Spirit's guidance to replace Judas, and in Acts 2 when he proclaimed salvation to the Jewish multitude at Pentecost and in Acts 8 when he, with John, authorized by the Spirit the inclusion of the Samaritans and Acts 10 when the Lord sent him to Gentiles in Caesarea.

The charge in v20 is another reminder that timing mattered in accomplishing Jesus' mission.

Matthew 16:21-28 is paralleled in Mark 8:31-9:1 and Luke 9:22-27

Jesus had previously intimated his death burial and resurrection (recall

12:40), but now the gauntlet had been thrown, and he made that outcome a priority in his teaching to the disciples. We are reminded by Peter's reaction, v22, that essentially no one expected the Christ to follow such a path. Jesus' path to divine victory and glory was not what the vast majority of Jews expected.

Despite the capitalization of "Satan" in most English Bibles (16:23), it really isn't a proper name. The word is descriptive, and means adversary. Jesus' words to Peter do remind us of his words to the devil in Matthew 4:10, except there it was "go away" and here it is "go behind me." Jesus' was definitely chastening Peter, but not giving up on him or sending him away. Everyone makes mistakes, everyone struggles to conform to God's will rather than to the world, and sometimes the world seems all too attractive, as opposed to the cross.

Jesus closely connects his own victory over death in resurrection with his coming in glory to raise everyone for judgment. The accomplishing of victory over death directly leads to the glory of his return in victory, no matter how many years pass between to sanctify God's holy people. The beginning of victory, Jesus coming in his kingdom, his victorious ascension into heaven, was close at hand (v28), and some of them would not die before that happened (at least two standing there did die before his coming in the kingdom, Jesus and Judas).

## Mark 8

Mark 8:1-21 is paralleled in Matthew 15:32-16:12

Jesus' mention of 3 days in 8:2 may have been intentional in view of 8:31.

Notice in Mark 8:15 the "leaven of Herod" is included with that of the religious teachers. Political leaders can be false prophets/teachers just as surely as religious teachers/prophets. Be wary of political agendas as well as religious doctrines that mislead and distract from the truth.

Matthew described the same misunderstanding as Mark in 8:17-18 but Mark reports the correction showing how strongly Jesus chastised the apostles at that time. Mark is very blunt about the failings of the apostles.

The healing of the blind man in v22-26 is unique in terms of how Jesus

did it. There is no explanation of why Jesus used spit, and laid hands on him, and healed him by steps rather than all at once. As noted before, the Lord used various means, apparently perceiving what was best in each case for the one he helped and for the onlookers. He could work in mysterious ways then, or now.

Considering that the ancient Christian writers believed Peter's preaching and teaching was the source of Mark's writing, we can note that Peter was very blunt about his own weaknesses and failures in following Jesus, v32-33.

"For my sake and the gospel's" in v35 intimates the reality that there is no distinction between honoring Jesus and following the gospel. Nothing is more important than honoring Jesus and his words, the good news of the kingdom in this life, so that he can honor us in the glory to come.

## Matthew 17

"The Transfiguration" of Jesus is recorded in Matthew 17:1-13, Mark 9:2-13, and Luke 9:28-36 with some variations in the details highlighted. It is also explicitly referred to by John in John 1:14, including an oblique reference to Peter's suggestion of tents (tabernacles, the Greek word in Matthew 17:4 is the noun corresponding to the Greek verb for "dwelt" in John 1:14); and by Peter in 2 Peter 1:16-18.

Matthew 17:1 is about a week after the confession of Christ at Caesarea Philippi. The high mountain was probably Mt Hermon, which is fitting for height (about 9,000 ft) and for geography and for prophetic reference (Psalm 89:12 in context, and Psalm 133, for example).

Peter, James and John, the innermost circle of Jesus' disciples. We have stories of Peter and John in Acts 1-12, and mention of them in Galatians 2, and some of their writing in the New Testament, but James we know almost nothing about. He clearly was prominent among the apostles, since Herod Agrippa put him to death to please the Jews in Acts 12, and then targeted Peter next, but we have no account of his work.

Moses and Elijah, in a sense the Law and the Prophets. Moses was succeeded by Joshua, whose name means Jehovah saves; and Elijah was succeeded by Elisha, whose name means God saves. And Jesus, with the

same name as Joshua (but with Greek spelling) is the final successor to both.

“This is my beloved Son...” an echo of what John heard when Jesus was baptized. Jesus carried the Father’s name unblemished as the anointed savior working among men. The voice from the cloud reminds us of Sinai, as does the bright cloud, the presence of God that led the people in the wilderness. In Luke’s account we have the detail that the conversation was about Jesus’ “departure” (Luke 9:31) which is the word “exodus.” Jesus is about to fulfill the role of Israel, the people called out of Egypt to be a holy nation and royal priesthood.

“Listen to him...” The Hebrew Bible constantly enjoins people to “hear” God. That is, listen and do what he says. The same here. Jesus is preeminent, he fulfills what Moses and Elijah never could, being God’s Son as they were not.

The healing of the demon afflicted boy, Matthew 17:14-21, is also found in Mark 9:14-28 and Luke 9:37-42, again with some differences in the details mentioned. Notice in Matthew 17:17 Jesus’ words embrace the shortcomings of his disciples, along with the people in general.

Note that the “symptoms” of the demonic oppression are different than various others mentioned previously. No matter, Jesus had the authority to put an end to it. The event became a teaching moment for Jesus to urge the disciples to put more trust in God. A little faith facilitates great things, because God is great.

Again in v22-23 Jesus was directly teaching what was now quickly approaching, his own death, burial and resurrection. This didn’t make sense to the disciples, but it disturbed them greatly.

The incident with the fish (17:24-27) is unique to Matthew, and while it has some potent messaging about the temple and the disciples, God’s household, one important message is that Jesus did not embarrass Peter for his blunder. Instead he gave him a way out, providing a “little” miracle so that Peter could save face. God cares about us in the details of our lives, not just the big events.

9:1 like Matthew 16:28 assured the disciples that while the coming in glory with the angels might be distant (Mark 8:38), the kingdom itself was almost upon them, established by the power of the Spirit. See Acts 1:7-8.

Mark's recounting of the transfiguration is very similar to Matthew's (17:1-13). Mark includes Peter's personal perspective on his words, v5-6, calling Jesus Rabbi (master and teacher) and speaking from fear without knowing what to say.

Along with other messages, the radiance of Jesus here reminds us of the radiant face of Moses whenever he directly interacted with God (Ex 34:33-35, and see 2 Corinthians 3:7-18).

The gospels regularly remind us of the fulfillment of scripture in the life and work of Jesus, as in Mark 9:12-13.

The healing of the demon oppressed boy in Mark 9:14-28 is quite similar to Matthew 17:14-23 and Luke 9:37-45, but Mark highlights the argument between the scribes and the disciples, and the reaction of the crowd to Jesus' appearance. Mark includes dramatic detail of the encounter, and the father's conversation with Jesus. The demon obeyed the voice of Jesus, but was as belligerent and defiant as it possibly could be to the last. The episode provided an opportunity for teaching about faith, and the value of equipping one's self through prayer (and fasting).

Mark also includes the detail in v30 that Jesus was trying to have private time with his disciples to prepare them for the events of his suffering and death that were hastening upon them.

Mark 9:33-37 is paralleled in Matthew 18:1-5 and Luke 9:46-48. Jesus is teaching them about his own suffering, and the disciples are arguing about their own positions of preeminence. Their quietness with questioned suggests they knew it was foolish. Jesus taught them graphically that being small, a willing servant and depending on the Father, is the real path to greatness in the kingdom. Generosity and hospitality are emphasized.

In v38-40 it's almost like John is trying to shift the focus from the embarrassing correction Jesus is giving (see also Luke 9:49-50). Jesus however told them not to go looking for fights, or view their position as

proprietary. It really was Jesus' purpose to have many working in his name, not just the immediate circle of chosen disciples. Small deeds for Jesus' name are great in the kingdom.

Mark 9:42-50 highlights what a great mistake it is to alienate someone from following Christ. If an attitude or action on our part causes someone else to stumble on their spiritual walk, that's the worst possible sin we could commit. Better to make great personal sacrifices and give up things that are precious to us, a hand or a foot (even political ideas), than to trip up another who might otherwise be saved.

The word "hell" in this passage (45) is Gehenna, the Old Testament Valley of Ben Hinnom, where children were burnt in sacrifice. This is reference to the lake of fire, eternal condemnation.

"Be at peace with each other." That does require making real personal sacrifices, on purpose.

## Matthew 18

Matthew 18:1-5 is similar to Mark 9:33-37 and Luke 9:46-48. Jesus taught his disciples (then and now) that unless one changes or turns to be like a child they cannot even enter the kingdom of heaven, and that the humility of being willingly small is true greatness in the kingdom of heaven. Echoing his own former teaching in Matthew 10:42 Jesus commended welcoming the children (v5), i.e. the small, the weak, the powerless, as he applies the illustration of the child to anyone who believes in him (v6).

The illustration of the millstone was probably quite dramatic, as there were probably millstones and olive presses in use around them on the streets of Capernaum, and the water visible just a short distance away. Christians, the citizens of the kingdom, must be very mindful of not letting worldly matters, things we care about that aren't of the kingdom, become a cause of stumbling for anyone else. The consequences of tripping up those who follow the Lord or might have followed him, are fiercely bad, and eternal.

The parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:12-14 is similar to, but not identical with, the parable in Luke 15:4-7. Don't look down on the weak, the powerless, the uninformed. Each and every wandering sheep is precious to

the Son of Man, and he will go to great lengths and make great sacrifices to find and rescue a lost sheep. We in turn must share his perspective, and value the saving of lost souls or the return of the wandering believer to the utmost.

The meaning of Jesus' reference to "their angels" in v10 isn't clear, but if we compare Luke 15:7 we have "more joy in heaven" over one sinner who repents than over 99 people who don't need to repent. The angels in heaven are definitely interested in the people of this world and the advancement of the kingdom of heaven.

It isn't God's will that "one of these little ones should perish." Hence, 2 Peter 3:9, the Lord is patient, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. Again, we should treasure every human soul above even our own bodies.

Matthew 18:15-20, settling issues with an errant brother, flows from the message of seeking the wandering sheep. The point isn't really about getting "justice" from a brother who has wronged us, it is about winning our brother back. Sometimes the path to fixing problems between brothers may require witnesses to affirm the right of the matter, and sometimes if a brother won't relent from wrong doing, the whole church must be informed and jointly regard that brother as unclean, unacceptable.

v18-19 are not to be taken as saying the first disciples or any disciples can make up laws for the kingdom of heaven, only the King himself has such authority, but the disciples, especially in unity, can and must deal with accepting the penitent, and disciplining the rebellious, knowing that the Lord's authority stands behind such necessary actions (see also 1 Corinthians 5:4-5, 2 Corinthians 2:5-11).

Peter's question reflected a Jewish Old Testament perspective, and Jesus' answer is a reminder of Genesis 4:15, 23-24. God's kingdom is about extreme forgiveness, not taking revenge. If we want to enjoy God's forgiveness, we have to learn to be forgivers ourselves. It's not optional.

## John 7-8

John 7-8 mention fierce opposition to Jesus, with several threats kill him. Note John 7:1, 13, 19, 25, 30, 32, 44; 8:37, 40, 59.

The timing of the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6 had been near Passover (6:4) and 7:2 takes up the story when the Feast of Booths/Tabernacles was near, about 6 months later. So Jesus spent about 6 months in Galilee because of the hostility of some Judean Jews.

Jesus' own brothers were doubters and critics (7:3-5, recall Mark 3:20-21, 31-33). After the resurrection they became staunch disciples of Jesus, but were not supportive during his ministry.

In his own time and quietly Jesus came late to the festival of Tabernacles, surprising multitudes there with his wisdom (John 7:15). Jesus attributed his understanding of the scriptures to his Father.

When Jesus refers to himself being condemned for healing a man on the Sabbath (7:23) that seems to be a reference back to 5:1-9. His non-traditional ways of honoring God on the Sabbath scandalized the Pharisees.

John reminds us several times that while Jesus came to die for our sins, the time had to be right, and so 7:8, 30, etc.

Jesus willingly drew the attention of the crowd during the ceremonies of the last day of the feast, acclaiming himself as the source of Living Water, which John explains is a reference to the Holy Spirit as given after Jesus was glorified (7:37-39, and recall 4:7-14, and the fulfillment described in Acts 2). Isaiah 55 especially comes to mind, as well as the water from the rock(s) in the wilderness, etc.

The thoughts in 7:40-42 reflected familiarity with the scriptures, but also omissions, such Isaiah 9:1ff.

The attitude of the professional priests and Pharisees in 7:45-52 toward the crowds and even their own hired soldiers indicates the arrogance of the ruling elites, so that even a modest defense from a prominent man like Nicodemus is rebuffed with ridicule.

The setting of the confrontation in John 8:1ff is the temple courts, so that when Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground it was probably in the dust on the ornate tiles Herod had paved the courts with. According to the law, if a man and woman were caught in adultery they were both to be

stoned. The setting then is peculiar, in accusing only the woman, and in bringing her to Jesus, especially where they could publicly confront him in the outer courts of the temple. Jesus did not play their game, first bending down to write on the ground, and then inviting the ones without sin to cast stones at her. His manner was sufficiently confident and humiliating that the crowd of opponents drifted away, leaving Jesus to offer her a new beginning, no condemnation, but a call to sin no more. She acknowledged him as Lord.

John 8 stresses the conflict various Jews had with Jesus' teachings and methods. In another "I am" statement, v12, Jesus presented himself as the light of the world, the only answer to the world's darkness. He insisted on having a personal relationship with God as his Father, and spoke openly of his death, being lifted up on a cross (v28, and recall 3:14ff).

Jesus elsewhere spoke of the challenge of discipleship, taking up a cross to follow him. In John he often challenges those who do believe in him to really mean it, as in 6:60-71 and 8:30ff. He wasn't looking for disciples of convenience who were not committed to him as the Way.

John 8:32 and 36 are noteworthy and memorable. v34 is the backdrop for Paul's teaching about sin in Romans, especially chapter 6.

The innuendo in 8:41 suggests that there were rumors of his mother Mary being pregnant before Joseph took her to be his wife.

The character of the devil is worth noting and remembering in 8:44-45. Satan invented lying as we see in the Garden of God, Genesis 3, and became a murderer when his deceit led Eve and Adam into sin. Note that Jesus considered Genesis 3 a literal historical account of the beginning.

As in other places, when they didn't like the message his opponents attacked the messenger, accusing Jesus of being a Samaritan, clearly a prejudicial slur (8:48) and possessed by a demon, deceived and deluded.

Jesus' affirmation that following him means never seeing death, 8:51, means he was doing something utterly new in his confrontation with Satan and the forces of darkness. To die in Christ is different than dying before Christ or dying apart from Christ. The experience of Abraham and the prophets in death is not the experience of the person who keeps Jesus'

word.

Jesus knew he would be glorified by God, alongside which everything else pales (v54ff). And he asserted that he himself knew of Abraham's day in a way that perplexed his critics, and so he made the most striking "I am" statement of all in 8:58, identifying himself with the name of the LORD in Exodus 3:14.

Jesus was in the temple courts when he said "I am" and they wanted to stone him. Do you wonder why there were stones there, in the temple courts, that they could pick up to stone him? (8:59)

John 9-10

"As he passed by..." in Jerusalem, out of the temple.

When the disciples asked if the man's blindness was due to his own sin or his parents they reflected common thinking of their own generation, and for that matter many people of every generation. Is personal suffering a direct consequence of sin? Job's friends thought so, but they spoke wrongly of the Lord. Rather, Jesus said, it wasn't about guilt, it was for divine purposes, that the works of God might be displayed in him. Remember John 6:28-29. To do the works of God begins with believing in the one He sent. See John 9:38 for the outcome of this encounter. The works of God were indeed seen displayed in him.

Jesus again asserted that he is the light of the world. Bringing light to the blind man was emblematic of the work Jesus came to do.

How unfortunate that neighbors and family would not stand up for the man who was healed, cowering before the religious bullies.

How unfortunate that the bullying religious leaders could not see that Jesus was doing the work of God every day, including the Sabbath.

A core problem, and all too common, is stated in v27. "I told you but you would not listen."

Note the common theme in the disciples question (v2) and the Pharisees attitude (v34). Such regard for a fellow human, presuming their

“worthlessness” for whatever reason, is contrary to the Lord’s will.

9:31 should be read in context. The words of the man who was healed, not the words of the Lord. And, he wasn’t saying God doesn’t hear a penitent sinner crying for help, he was saying it isn’t reasonable to think God would grant a sinner the results that Jesus was showing. He rightly understood that the powerful good works Jesus was doing showed God’s approval.

9:38, the formerly blind man believed in Jesus, God’s works were displayed in him, and he worshiped Jesus, consistent with Jesus being not just a good man but the very Son of God.

Jesus’ assertion that “I am the good shepherd” and the attendant teaching laid claim to prophecies such as Isaiah 40:10-11, Ezekiel 37:15-28 (esp. v24), and Psalm 23. The promise of one flock (10:16) embraces the Jews, the Israelites who were lost among the nations, and all nations.

The Feast of The Dedication (10:22) is the winter celebration of the deliverance won in the days of the Maccabees, also called Hanukkah. It isn’t in the Law or the Old Testament at all, but originated about 165 years before Jesus was born.

Once again Jesus’ claim of being from heaven, from the Father, one with the Father, prompted some Jews in the temple courts to want to stone him (10:31). They understood that he was claiming to be God (10:33) and Jesus did not deny it. Rather he affirmed that there are those the Lord God calls gods (Psalm 82) who have not kept their divine place but have neglected justice and obedience to the Lord God. If such disobedient servants could be called “gods” then his works of obedience certainly proved his qualifications to make such a claim.

John, approaching the climactic final week of Jesus’ life in Jerusalem, takes us with Jesus in 10:40-42 back to the place in John 1 where Jesus had been baptized and John had pointed him out as the Lamb of God to Jesus’ first disciples. We’ve come full circle, and Jesus knew his time indeed had come.

Luke 10

Luke's record of the sending out and return of the 70, Luke 10:1-12, 17-20, has no parallel in the other gospels. The woes pronounced against cities that did not listen, v13-15, are similar to Matthew 11:21-23; and the declaration of thankfulness in 21-22 is similar to Matthew 11:25-27.

John the Baptist had been sent by God "before your face" to prepare the way (Luke 7:27). The same Greek words here in Luke 10:1 describe the mission of the 70.

As Jesus intentionally chose 12 apostles to align with the fulfillment of Israel's purpose, so also most likely he chose 70 messengers in view of the family of Jacob that went into Egypt, the 70 elders who judged Israel, and etc.

Luke 9:51 stated that Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" because the time was near for him to be taken up. 9:62 indicates Jesus' own determination, not to turn back. In 9:52 he'd sent some messengers to a town in Samaria, and then in 10:1 he sent the 70 ahead to every town he would visit as he worked his way toward Jerusalem. Their specific preparatory role was not exactly the same as that of the 12 in 9:1-6, but they were empowered to do signs and wonders in Jesus' name.

Jesus saw much opportunity for bringing people into God's purposes, and not enough workers, just as in sending the 12 in Matthew 9:37ff. The nearness of the kingdom of God was their primary message.

It's a disastrous mistake to reject one who speaks the Lord's message.

The joy of the returning 70 is a pleasant highlight of 10:17-24, coupled with Jesus' own joy that they were his own.

There are numerous references to the fall of Satan in the Bible, beginning with his condemnation in Genesis 3, that he would go on his belly and eat dust, and culminating with his defeat and being cast down in Revelation 12 and bound in Revelation 20, until he is finally and permanently cast into the lake of fire. The means of his defeat is alluded to in Genesis 3, being stomped by the seed of the woman, and described in Revelation 12:11 as by the blood of the Lamb and the word of Christian testimony. The 70 hadn't caused Satan's fall, but as they defeated demons and illnesses by the power of Christ they contributed to it, as do we when

we hold firmly to the testimony of Jesus. I suspect Jesus was smiling when he reacted to their enthusiasm about power over demons. The signs weren't the thing though, having your name in the book of life is the thing.

The Holy Spirit has something to do with the joy of the Lord, 10:21. If we have the Spirit within, he has something to do with our joy too.

Knowing what they knew (and through the apostles, what we know), was a great blessing, made possible only by God's will (v21-24). The prophets had glimpses, and wanted to understand what their foretelling really meant, but it couldn't be known until it was put into fulfillment by God's right arm.

The story of the Samaritan neighbor amounted to some very disturbing teaching for the lawyer and the Jewish audience. The question in v25 wasn't an honest question, as was shown by his own ability to answer it from the scriptures when Jesus put it back to him. Embarrassed at being caught out, he tried to justify himself by asking, "who is my neighbor?" The same, or very similar questions, have been posed many times. The answer Jesus gave through a parable implies that any one we encounter is our neighbor, and it to be loved, and treated accordingly. The road down to Jericho passes through some very rough country, and there were plenty of places for bandits. The priest was going down, away from Jerusalem, when he bypassed the robbed and wounded man. Likewise the Levite. They had no excuse for avoiding the injured man except fear and/or not wanting to get involved. The Samaritan, on the other hand, took personal responsibility for the injured stranger. Samaritan's were despised by the Jews, and as indicated in Luke 9:51-53, the Samaritans had no fondness for the Jews and particularly for Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the Samaritan did what was right for a stranger, over and above what might be expected, and despite prejudice the lawyer had to admit it in answering Jesus, though he studiously avoided saying "the Samaritan" and instead replied "the one who showed mercy."

Martha and Mary (v38-42) are mentioned by John also, along with their brother Lazarus, and Mary is mentioned in all 4 gospels for anointing Jesus prior to his suffering. The account of the meal where Martha was greatly distracted is only in Luke, and highlights, among other things, that women sat at Jesus' feet when he taught. Most traditional rabbis would not have had women in the position of disciples at their feet, but they would have

been fine with the role Martha took upon herself. Hospitality is a wonderful thing, highly commended in the scriptures, but “Martha was distracted with much serving.” She was missing out on the opportunity of a lifetime while fretting about the meal, and fretting about her sister listening to the Lord. Mary will also be at the feet of Jesus in the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead, and again she will be at Jesus feet when she anoints him with expensive perfume before his death.

### Luke 12-13

Jesus’ message in Luke 12:2-9 is similar to Matthew 10:26-33. Perhaps the multitudes in 12:1 are the same as those described as “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” in Matthew 9:36.

The leaven/yeast of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. In Matthew 16:12 Matthew described the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees as their teaching. Hypocrisy amounts to saying one thing and doing another, putting on a false face for an audience.

12:4-7 highlights the confidence of God’s watchful care that Christians should always have, that even in the most daunting circumstances God is seeing to our best interests.

While the average Christian should not expect to speak with the inspired authority of an apostle, remembering that Luke wrote this gospel about 30 years after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the admonition in 12:8-12 was critical for every believer, and still is, for disciples of Jesus to trust the Lord and count on the help of the Spirit in order to be able to confess the Lord under pressure. We should not quench the Spirit with a doubtful, “I don’t know what to say” or cripple your defense of the faith by doubtfully anticipating, “I wouldn’t know how to answer.”

If Jesus had been seeking an ordinary sort of kingdom, the kind of question posed in 12:13 would have been just the sort of opportunity he would seize to gain popularity (see 2 Samuel 15:1-6). But that’s not the sort of kingdom Jesus was promoting. Yet, Jesus answer in the parable suggests the man (and others in that crowd, and still today) had a problem in the pursuit of “justice” against his brother. Namely, covetousness. Trusting in wealth, whatever stuff we accumulate or pursue, amounts to the same mistake as the fear of threat in 12:4-7, failing to trust God in all

circumstances, and act in faith.

The message not to worry, but to trust God (12:22-34), is the same theme again as in 12:4-7, 8-12, and 13-21. It is substantially the teaching as Matthew 6:25-33, but has the lovely encouragement in 12:32. God is pleased to bless his followers with the kingdom of heaven. Hospitality and sharing with those in need are the best “investment” of all, preparing for a grand future with the Lord.

In the continued theme, trust God, v35-40 stress doing the Lord’s will as his servants, tending his house alertly while he prepares for the wedding feast, and being invited to the festal table when the master comes at an unexpected time. Peter was uncertain whether Jesus meant the chosen apostles (v41) or everyone, and Jesus answer in another parable basically said, “you take care of your business and you’ll be blessed. But if anyone abuses what the Lord entrusts them with, they will suffer dire consequences.” Consequences, in this parable, whose severity depends on the opportunity the servant had to know what he/she was supposed to do.

The fire Jesus came to cast on earth (12:49-50) was alluded to by John prior to Jesus baptism (Luke 3:9, 17). There are allusions here to Jesus’ suffering and death, and also to the persecution of the church, the destruction of Jerusalem and to his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. The disruption of peace in a world divided over Jesus (12:49-53, see also Matthew 10:34-49) was foreshadowed in Micah 7:6.

People in general don’t recognize “the signs of the times” as in 12:54-56. Still true in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Consider 12:57-59 reflecting back on 12:13-14. Having said that people will be hostile against his own disciples, and that people will be divided against each other, Jesus nevertheless lays it on his disciples to be peacemakers and work things out with adversaries as best we can.

On the one hand, it’s easy to read 13:1-5 as a commentary on sin in general, and the need for everyone to repent. That’s true, all sinners, which is everyone, need to repent. But there was a particular application, at that moment in time, of Jesus’ language, in reference to a Roman ruler slaughtering people in the temple courts, and in reference to walls falling on

ordinary people and crushing them, those things literally lay ahead for Jerusalem and Judea unless they en masse turned and accepted the Christ. They did not, and literally, the Jewish nation that did not repent did “likewise perish” in 70 AD.

In context with “interpreting the times” and “you will all likewise perish” in the preceding verses, 13:6-9 particularly applied to the generation Jesus was talking too. They had a little more time, and opportunity to bear fruit for God by turning to Jesus, but the window of opportunity was limited. Broadly, the window is limited for everyone in every generation.

The demon/unclean spirit oppressing the woman in 13:10 is referred to as “a disabling spirit.” The symptoms of demon oppression were widely varied. The healing provides yet another “opportunity” for Jesus to confront the distortion of God’s commands by unmerciful, unloving, intolerable interpretations collated into ruling traditions. Jesus was willing to shame those who twisted God’s word into bonds of oppression. There is more than one kind of “disabling spirit.” Note that Jesus attributed the effects of the spirit to Satan in v16. This is the kingdom of darkness Jesus came to liberate people from.

The kingdom started small, and grew, Luke 13:18-21. That’s the nature of the kingdom, and it won’t be thwarted.

Right now, there is an open door, a door that is narrow, you can’t bring big loads through this door, burdens must be discarded to enter, but the door will close one day (13:22-30) and when it’s too late, it really is too late. Being on the outside when the faithful, including the patriarchs and prophets, are on the inside, will be horrible. Those inside who have passed unencumbered through the narrow door are not just the Hebrew patriarchs and prophets, but people from everywhere.

Jesus’ allusion to the 3<sup>rd</sup> day in v32, finishing his course, very likely references his own suffering, death and resurrection. That’s when the greatest cure and casting out of demons occurred, when Jesus through death defeated Satan. At the same time, Jesus was lamenting over the fate of the current city of Jerusalem, which he longed to save, but could not because of their unwillingness. v35 is curious because on the one hand there were Jewish pilgrims shouting “blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” at the triumphal entry (Luke 19:38) which was the correct

welcome of the King (Psalm 118:26), but Jesus here seems to refer to a grander acknowledgment of his reign and authority when he comes again in glory.

## Luke 14-15

Every time Luke mentions the Sabbath Jesus was in a controversy. Five times he recorded Jesus doing miracles (healings) on the Sabbath, 4:31, 4:38, 6:6, 13:14, 14:4. One of those times, Peter's mother-in-law, was in a private home. The others were public healings that antagonized the religious leaders. Their ritualized lack of compassion and distortion of the commandments to love and show mercy and do justice are highlighted in these confrontations, which were a major motive for killing Jesus.

The Greek word for the illness in 14:2 is a medical term. Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14). The term refers to bodily swelling, edema, retention of fluids in the body. One can imagine that when Jesus healed him he visibly shrank before their eyes.

Sabbath meals were prepared the day before (see Exodus 16:22-23).

The host in v1 was a ruler of the Pharisees, and apparently well off. Seating at the meal had more and less desirable places, and the seats of high regard were sought by those who craved status and recognition. Jesus counseled them all to show humility instead and let others give them honor, if it is due. The principle in v11 is demonstrated over and over again in the Bible.

The teaching in v12-14, generosity instead of reciprocity in hospitality, is one of many that is hard to keep in practice, but nevertheless the Lord's directive.

The response in v15 was probably a trite saying without much thought, as was the question in 13:23, and evoked a similar kind of response from Jesus. The gist of the parable of the banquet is that a lot of people, just as in the parable of the narrow door, will be too distracted with other things, their own interests, to come to the feast. Folks who find their satisfaction in the affairs of this world or their own pursuits will miss out on the great feast prepared by God. But the Master, intending to fill his household with guests, invites others, anyone and everyone, to come in and enjoy the

bounty. He wants his servants (us) to find people who will come to the feast, people who seem unlikely and people who seem too distant to bring.

For hating family to follow Jesus, see Deuteronomy 13:6-11. No one thing can hinder the faithful following of the Lord. Not even our own life, Luke 14:25-27. While salvation is a gift freely given, following Jesus demands total commitment to him, giving up everything to be his servant. He's not kidding about this. Salt that isn't salty isn't even good for compost.

Jesus did what he said. He welcomed the people of lowest caste (14:21) and those who seemed least likely to follow God (14:23, 15:1-2). Jesus turned again to the theme of himself as shepherd, a shepherd who isn't going to abandon a lost sheep. The three parables of Luke 15 each set forth the idea of the lost being found. The first, the lost sheep, there is no particular fault, but there is great risk, first to the sheep and then to the shepherd seeking the sheep. In the second, the lost coin, perhaps there is some carelessness, but recovering the lost coin is of paramount importance, and great effort is expended. In the third, the lost son, he himself is clearly to blame for his own waste and loss, but the Father watches in hope that his errant child will come home, and welcomes the lost as the son he has always loved and wanted with him. The elder brother is the unhappy reflection on the attitude in 15:2, scribes and Pharisees grumbling about tax collectors and sinners coming to Jesus and welcomed by him. We surely want to be numbered among those who like the shepherd, the woman, and the father, seek the lost and celebrate their return, along with the angels of God in heaven.

#### Luke 16-17

The parable in Luke 16:1-9 is complementary to the preceding parable of the lost son. Both are stories of squandered wealth (15:13, 16:1). The one by the son who went away for a time, the other by the steward who stayed put, until he was caught. The son humbled himself and came home, the steward continued in character and used his position to provide for himself as best he could. While the dishonest manager is "commended" (v8) for being shrewd, clever in his planning (the same Greek word that describes the serpent in Genesis 3:1), he squandered not just the Master's goods but his own stable position and safe future for a the fickle goodwill of untrustworthy friends. Nevertheless, the idea of using resources in a positive way, to help others in order "to win friends," is an application Jesus

presented, consistent with the preceding remarks in 14:12-14 and 15:1-2ff.

What Jesus said about the use of wealth in generosity, being faithful to God, was directed to the group of disciples (16:1), but like the preceding parables, in the hearing of the Pharisees who were his critics (15:2, 16:14ff). The Pharisees had adopted something like a “prosperity gospel,” equating wealth with God’s blessings and approval, and so rationalizing a love of money.

v16, John was a fulcrum, the turning point from Old Testament prophets to New Covenant good news of the Christ and the kingdom of God. The idea in 16b of people forcing their way into the kingdom or pressing into it (see also Matthew 11:12) may refer to the multitudes searching for deliverance that went to Jesus, or may conversely refer to efforts of the Pharisees and Herodians and Zealots and others to remake the kingdom in their own image. Nevertheless, v17 affirms that God’s word will be accomplished.

v18 stands out in context, except that it was a major sticking point for the Jews of that generation, divorce and remarriage, in the setting of Roman immorality, and so was a very pertinent example of the Law standing against all opposition and contrary to rationalizing redefinition. Besides the specific moral import, there is the idea Paul expanded on in Romans 7:1ff, that the Pharisees and all the Jews were bound to the Law, and other allegiances, including their own traditions, were adulterous. The prophets of the 8th-6th centuries BC often wrote of Israel’s marital unfaithfulness to God her husband.

Reading the story of the rich man and Lazarus, don’t forget the context of the dialogue that began in 15:1-2, and the point Jesus made about faithfulness and loving money in 16:10-15. Along with the overall messages about the authority of the Law and Prophets in reference to Jesus (connect 16:14-17 and 16:31), and the demand that we use resources generously, there are numerous incidentals in Jesus’ story that inform our understanding of death,. The two characters are aware and having experiences out of the body (really, 3 characters, since Abraham is in the story too). The characters are still themselves, and remember their physical life and experiences. The rich man is still self-centered with no regard for Lazarus, whom he recognized. There is a distinctly different experience for those who love wealth, and those who are really in Abraham’s family (recall

Genesis 15:15, 25:8). Lazarus was taken up, by the angels, while the rich man went down into Hades and was in a torture room, a room like the Romans used to “examine” the accused by flogging to extract confessions. Life choices carry us into an irrevocable destiny after death. The scriptures point irrefutably to a godly life and to Jesus Christ. The Pharisees who refused to believe Jesus while he lived would continue to refuse even when he rose from the dead. Their problem wasn’t a lack of evidence, it was a lack of willingness.

Luke 17:1-4 summarizes some of the same teachings found in Matthew 18. Notice the reaction of the disciples in v5 to the command to forgive in v3-4. They understood that forgiveness like this isn’t a matter of feelings, but a matter of faith. Such forgiveness comes through trusting God, not through how we feel about someone who wrongs us. Jesus’ answer is really a bit dismissive, saying that obedience didn’t really require more faith, a very little faith is very powerful, certainly powerful enough to do what we ought.

v7-10 puts the difficult demand to forgive others into the context of duty and expectation as servants of the Lord. Faithful service earns nothing, we owe everything to the Master and need the humility of knowing we could never do enough in his service. Duty has its place in the service of the Lord, because feelings will let us down.

On the way to Jerusalem... remember 9:51-53... the 10 lepers, 17:11-20, stood at a distance and called out for mercy. He sent them to “the priests” because only priests could examine and certify cleanness for a leper who’s disease cleared up. This story, like the parable in 10:25ff, makes a point about Samaritans being potential children of God. The Samaritan was the only one who directly showed his gratitude... he had faith like a mustard seed, and he did his duty. Though a “foreigner” from Israel, he had servant faith that the 9 lacked. Note that they called Jesus “Master,” a word previously used only by the disciples of Jesus in addressing him.

Jesus had told his disciples to pray for God’s kingdom to come (11:2) but he told the Pharisees “the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” or “among you” (17:20-21). How could it be coming and among them at the same time? God has always been king (see Numbers 23:1, Deuteronomy 33:5) but disobedience had come between God and Israel. God’s presence

in the person of Jesus the king (Luke 19:38, 23:3, 23:38) meant that the kingdom was present, but still coming when Jesus would overcome the rulers of this world and ascend into glory to reign at the Father's right hand, and finally to come in glory to separate the wheat from the chaff. There is the right now, the soon to be, and the finality all laid out in Luke 17:20ff. Speaking to his disciples (as also in Matthew 24-25), first comes rejection in 17:25, then comes an interval of longing for his appearance in 17:22, and then his unmistakable appearance to everyone, everywhere, at one moment in 17:24. The revealing of the glorified Son of Man (v30) will be at a time of great wickedness, as in Noah's world and in Sodom, when the world continues as though everything were normal, sudden and unexpected destruction came upon them. So also with the Lord's return, be ready to go with no hang-ups about leaving everything else behind. This discourse has some of the elements of Matthew 24-25, but especially focuses on the departure and return of Jesus, with little emphasis on the destruction of Jerusalem in the Jewish revolt (first against the Lord and then against the Romans), which is an important part of Matthew's prophetic message. The question and reply in v37 suggest a the carnage of a battlefield, which did apply to Jerusalem's destruction, but also applies to the final overthrow of this world when Jesus returns, Revelation 19:17-21.

## John 11

The primary theme of John 11 is the glory of God in connection with the death and restoration of Lazarus.

Lazarus, and his sisters Mary and Martha, lived in the village of Bethany about 2 miles east of Jerusalem (11:18), over the crest of the Mt of Olives. They were friends of Jesus and loved by him. The village of Bethany is where Jesus borrowed the donkey to ride to Jerusalem. The village of Bethany is where Jesus spent the nights during his final week in Jerusalem (see Mark 11:1, 11, 12; 14:3). The village of Bethany was in the vicinity of Jesus ascension into heaven (Luke 24:50-51).

Jesus had gone across the Jordan (John 10:40) to the area of another Bethany, mentioned in John 1:28, where John the Baptist had acclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of God. He'd left Jerusalem because the Pharisees and the council were trying to arrest him (10:39-40).

The account of Mary anointing Jesus (11:2) will be in John 12, and is

mentioned without Mary's name in the other gospels as well.

Lazarus' illness prompted the sisters to send for Jesus, but he delayed in coming. No doubt he could have healed Lazarus across the miles, but he did not. He stated that the illness was not "unto" death, that it would not "end in death" (NASB, NIV, and others), but was for God's glory. Recall John 9:3 and see John 13:31 where Jesus described his own death as going to his own glory and God's glory. Sometimes, many times, God is glorified in the faithful suffering of his people, even his own Son. "Be faithful unto death." The story in John 11 highlights that the Lord suffers grief with those he loves, but he looks ahead to the outcome.

Note Thomas's conviction in v16.

Notice the dynamic of how Jesus described himself to Martha in 11:25-26. Recall John 5:24 and 4:13-14. The one who believes in Jesus has a fundamentally different expectation in death than the one who doesn't. Jesus was changing everything about death and dying for those who believe in him, as he overcame death and took the keys of death and Hades (Hebrews 2:14, Revelation 1:18).

Martha's confession of faith in Jesus in 11:27 is right in line with Peter's in Matthew 16:16.

When Mary approached Jesus she fell at his feet (11:32). She's the one who sat at Jesus' feet as a disciple when he visited their home in Bethany in Luke 10:39.

Both sisters knew Jesus could have healed Lazarus. Both expressed their disappointment that he had not (11:21, 32). They reproached Jesus, and he accepted their reproach and their disappointment. He knew that his decision had been horrible for them, and he was not offended by their plaintive complaint. Indeed, he was "deeply moved and greatly troubled" by that and the whole scene of grief (11:33). And he wept. Even knowing Lazarus would rise, he wept for the loss, the grief, the sadness of what death does in this world.

Jesus prayed out loud, so that those who watched would understand what happened there.

There are several contrasts in the details, and some similarities, with Jesus' impending death, burial and resurrection. This tomb was a cave, not a rich man tomb cut into the rock. This tomb had a stone laid across the entrance, not rolled before it. Manpower was required to take away this stone, while the stone where Jesus was buried was rolled back by an angel/earthquake. Lazarus was dead 4 days, while Jesus rose on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. Lazarus needed helping hands to remove the linen strips and face cloth, while Jesus left behind the linen cloths he'd been wrapped with, and set aside the face cloth. Jesus had the authority to lay down his life and take it up again, Lazarus did not. The raising of Lazarus is not called "resurrection." The word "resurrection" is almost always used for those who rise to live forever, not those raised to die again.

For some skeptics and scoffers, Jesus' signs and wonders didn't inspire belief, they just made him more dangerous. They feared that Jesus would have "everyone" believing in him, and in their twisted world view that would be horrible because then the Romans would come down on them and they would lose their stuff and their power. They trusted neither the word of God nor the works of Jesus. And so they determined, as prophetically uttered by the high priest, that it was "better that one man should die for the people," though Caiaphas had no understanding of the real reason that was better. He did not understand defeating death and bringing salvation, but he spoke rightly even while he himself was utterly wrong. And so, having done the most remarkable miracle on could imagine, Jesus once again withdrew from Jerusalem to pick his time for completing his mission. And that time would be Passover, which celebrated the beginning of the nation, the deliverance from slavery to become a people of God, the day the firstborn of Egypt died that God's firstborn might be free.

## Luke 18

The parable of the persistent widow, as Luke notes, was to teach Jesus' followers to keep on praying and not get discouraged. When it seems to us that things aren't working out as they should, keep on praying. The prayer exemplified here is in particular a prayer for justice, that God will set things right. Revelation echoes the message with frequent mentions that the troubles of the world call for the patient endurance of the saints, knowing that God will hear our prayers and will bring justice. The rhetorical question in v8 is elsewhere answered in the affirmative, but the indication of the question is that many will not persist in trusting God.

In the parable of v9-14 again Luke telegraphs some points we are to understand from the story, in v9 and v14. Don't look down on others or feel/act superior to them. Instead honestly humble yourself, knowing your own failings before God.

The request that Jesus touch children in v15-17 wasn't for healing, but for blessing. Something we scarcely consider in this generation. Is there value in blessing children? Both the parents and Jesus thought it was worthwhile. Several times the disciples and others tried to run interference for Jesus, "Don't bother the Teacher," but every time Jesus made himself available to heal, to help, to encourage. v17 is consistent with the preceding 2 parables, the weak and powerless, the humble, the one like a child is justified by God and enters the kingdom of God.

The story of the rich ruler in 18-31 highlights the problem of the one who has power and status and finds it very difficult to humble himself and give up the wealth he trusts in. We know from Jesus' own teachings (Matthew 5 for example) and from the writings of the apostles that the ruler's answer in v21 about keeping the commandments was either misguided or dishonest, and very likely Jesus mentioned the specific commandments he did because he knew the man and whether he lied or lusted or hated or withheld assistance to his parents, all of which Jesus drew out of the particular commandments listed. He was saddened by Jesus' seemingly extreme invitation, which led to a comment about how hard it is for the rich to enter God's kingdom, in contrast to those who humble themselves and depend on God in the previous stories of the chapter. This is Luke 17:33-37 exemplified.

Luke most often talks about Jesus teaching and traveling with his disciples, but in 18:31 he specifically taught the 12 apostles again about his imminent suffering, death, and resurrection. The teaching was direct and explicit, but they didn't see that he was speaking literally. No one truly expected a suffering and dying Christ to save them and rule the world.

The blind man in the vicinity of Jericho (remember that Jesus was in route from Galilee to Jerusalem, and had taken a winding route to visit many cities along the way) had heard enough to identify "Jesus of Nazareth" as "Jesus, Son of David," a messianic title. Again, people told the poor man to not bother the Teacher, but he was insistent, and Jesus

was willingly merciful. Jesus healed him, accrediting his faith for the wellness he received, and unlike the rich ruler in the previous story he gladly followed Jesus and gave God glory. Others who saw what happened also praised God.

## Matthew 19

Jesus was on the eastern side of the Jordan River (as also in Mark 10:1-12 and John 10:40). His adversaries the Pharisees attempted, again, to catch him in a controversial subject, divorce and remarriage. Jesus's answer when he was tested, as in Matthew 4, was to cite scripture.

According to Jesus Genesis 1-2 are historical and record the beginning, as he cites Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 as warrants for his answer, and an allusion to Malachi 2:15.

Jesus by his statements excludes any "alternatives." By design, marriage is one man united to one woman, and by design that is the one appropriate and permissible form of sexual union.

The Deuteronomy statement about divorce mentioned by the Pharisees here is in 24:1-4. It's an "if/then" statement, offering no justification for divorce, not a commandment as such, but rather case law, setting limits on treating marriage and divorce as a trivial thing. Jesus emphatically taught that marriage, divorce, and remarriage are not trivial, and generally come about because of hard hearts, resulting from sin and resulting in sin. What some refer to as the exception for sexual immorality (fornication in some versions, v9) is basically the theme of Numbers 5.

Divorce and remarriage then, as now, was all too common, and Jesus' teaching was stricter than most rabbis taught, and so the disciples, or some of them, were concerned about marriage if it is so strong a bond. Jesus did offer an alternative to marital fidelity, either forced or voluntary celibacy.

19:13-15 parallels Mark 10:13-16 and Luke 18:15-17. The teacher is not bothered by people, even children, coming to him, but he is bothered by people, even his disciples, keeping people away.

The account of the rich man in 19:16-29 parallels Mark 10:17-30 and Luke 18:18-30, with some differences in wording and the details included,

as naturally happens with eye witness testimony. Being wealthy can easily be a trap, beguiling the wealthy to cling to the world rather than whole heartedly love the Lord.

The promise to those who do leave everything (v27) to follow Jesus is manifold blessings in the time of renewal when redeemed humans come into God's presence. The renewal isn't finished yet, but is underway, with the authority of the apostles endorsed by Jesus' commission as in Matthew 28:16-20. Again, in v30, the kingdom of heaven is an upside down kingdom, with the humble exalted and the proud humbled.

## Mark 10

In parallel with Matthew 19:1-9, Mark 10:1-12 focuses on divorce and remarriage as contrary to God's design and his will. Generally, divorce and remarriage either occur because of sexual sin, or result in sexual sin. Serious sin is involved, and truly every effort should be made to be faithful to God by being faithful to one another in marriage.

Mark 10:13-16, about the children coming to Jesus, echoes Matthew 19:13-15 and Luke 18:15-17. Mark adds that Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them. Imagery of Isaiah 40:11 comes to mind.

Mark 10:17-31 parallels Matthew 19:16-30 and Luke 18:18-30. Mark's focus on the conversation shifts one emphasis of the encounter to a consideration of who Jesus is. Is he good? Only God is good. Did the man understand what he was saying? (No, he really didn't.)

Following Jesus sacrificially is about treasure in heaven (10:22) and entering the kingdom of God (10:23) and eternal life (10:30).

Mark 10:32-34, Jesus again telling his disciples about his imminent suffering, death, and resurrection, parallels Luke 18:31-33 and Matthew 20:17-19. Notice again the description of the disciples reactions to Jesus in Mark's record, 10:32, they were "amazed and ... afraid."

The controversy in 10:35-45 is paralleled in Matthew 20:20-28, and is especially unfortunate in the context of Jesus's being in route to his sacrificial suffering and death. Grown-ups sometimes are childish in altogether the wrong way. The admonition in v42-45 is for all of us in all

times and places. Again, the Lord's kingdom is upside down, with the servant being exalted and the would be rulers being abased.

The fact that Mark (probably quoting Peter) names the blind beggar near Jericho suggests that he really did become a follower of Jesus, and not just for a moment in time. The same story is found in Luke 18:35-43 and Matthew 20:29-34, with differences in details recalled, including Matthew mentioning a second blind beggar who is omitted by Mark and Luke.

### Matthew 20-21

The parable of the workers in the vineyard, Matthew 20:1-16, highlights the idea that while people are called to work in the Lord's vineyard/kingdom, the "wages" given are not merely quid pro quo, but rather the master's generosity, v14-15. He keeps his promises of recompense, not according to our effort but according to his abundance. And again, v16, the kingdom of heaven is upside down to the way the world generally thinks.

Matthew 20:17-29 is paralleled in Mark 10:32-34 and Luke 18:31-33, as Jesus warns the disciples of his rapidly approaching suffering.

Matthew 20:20-28 is paralleled in Mark 10:35-45. Matthew includes the detail that Mr. Zebedee was in the company of travelers and approached Jesus with her sons' request, but Jesus' answer clearly shows it was James and John's request. The men committed to imitating Jesus to the extreme, but even so, some honors were foreordained by the Father from all of history and not available for the whims of ambitious or competitive men. Be a servant, that's part of drinking the Lord's cup.

The healing of the blind men near Jericho is in Matthew 20:29-34, Mark 10:46-52, and Luke 18:35-43. Matthew includes a 2<sup>nd</sup> blind man not mentioned by Mark or Luke, Mark gives the name of the one he focused on. The differing details indicate shades of difference in what the disciples noted and focused on that day, and subsequently wanted to teach from the experience. The individuality of the gospel accounts highlights that we have the testimony of multiple witnesses to the work and words of Christ.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey was a decision he made to

fulfill a prophecy from Zechariah, essentially proclaiming his own kingship (Zechariah 9:9) and imitating (in humility) Solomon's inaugural ride into Jerusalem on David's mule (1 Kings 1:38-40) to acclaim his as king and foil an attempted coup. This event is one of the few reported by all four gospel writers (Matthew 21:1-9, Mark 11:1-10, Luke 19:29-38, John 12:12-15). They offer different details of course and focus on selected aspects of what transpired and how it all connected to Jesus' purposes.

Driving out the buyers and sellers in the courts of the temple is reported in Matthew 21:12-16 and Mark 11:15-18 and Luke 19:45-47. Matthew's shorter account highlights the direct connection between royal ride and the confrontation at the temple where "business as usual" was going on, enriching the professional priests and others, while the Christ was openly declaring himself. What Jesus did at the temple was a deliberate confrontation, not rage or uncontrolled anger. The religious officials "saw the wonderful things he did" and "they were indignant."

The triumphal entry almost certainly happened on the first day of the week, the 10<sup>th</sup> of Abib, the day the Passover lamb was set apart for sacrifice (Exodus 12:3).

The cursing of the fig tree in Matthew 21:18-22 is also in Mark 11:12-14/20-24. Mark details the chronology more than Matthew. Matthew went straight to the "teaching moment" where Jesus reminded the disciple of the power of prayer. This demonstration is the one time the disciples saw the other side of Jesus' power, the power to curse as well as to bless. He could have called down a curse on his opponents, struck them dead like the fig tree, but he didn't. Yet, the authority to judge and to curse is certainly his.

Connecting the dots in the 4 gospels, Jesus went over the Mt of Olives back to Bethany every night of that Passover week (21:17), pausing at the garden of Gethsemane along the way for prayer, and so Judas knowing the habit knew where to find Jesus on the night of his betrayal.

The questions of the professional clergy and ruling elders in 22:23ff reflect the thinking of bureaucrat, not truth seekers. Jesus was challenging their ways of doing business and their turf, and they didn't like it. Jesus in response challenged them to simply and directly state a truth, and they declined.

The parable of 2 sons hit a sore spot with the religious leaders, Jesus' followers including repentant sinners of various kinds, people they'd written off as worthless. Jesus stressed that actual obedience calls for doing what God says, not merely saying you will. It isn't the start that matters, it's the finish.

Note in 21:45 that the power brokers understood that Jesus parable of the tenants was about their mismanagement of God's house and God's people. The illustration of Israel as God's vineyard was used several times by the prophets. They understood, but they stubbornly proceeded to do what he predicted in v38, with the disastrous results he foretold, their destruction and the end of the nation and the temple and their practice of the Law. The citation of Psalm 118:22-23 and related passages in Isaiah 40:6-8 and 8:14, Jesus as the rejected cornerstone and capstone, are found several times in the New Testament as fulfilled in Jesus. Quoted in the temple courts it had great import for the future temple of God, not built of dead stones by human hands, but living stones growing together.

The fear of speaking the truth about John in Matthew 21:26 also hindered the religious leaders from arresting Jesus publicly in the highly charged festal atmosphere of Jerusalem that week, 21:46.

## Luke 19

Jesus reaching out to the curious tax collector, Zacchaeus, at Jericho, highlights a theme seen all through Luke, stated in v10, that Jesus came to seek and save the lost. This is a particular emphasis in Luke (recall 5:32). Ironically, the wealthy tax collector received Jesus with an open heart where previous accounts told of Pharisees who hosted Jesus and had not been so receptive (7:36ff, 14:1ff).

Jericho is near Jerusalem (v11). A walking distance of about 15 miles that climbs 3400 feet. It's an ascent that takes about 8 hours walking, with pauses to rest and eat along the way.

The parable of the minas is geographically appropriate. When Jesus was a child in Egypt Jericho had been the center of power for Herod Archelaus (see Matthew 2:22), the son of Herod "the great" who went to Rome to request being made king in his deceased father's place. Some of the citizens of Jericho had traveled to Rome to protest Archelaus rule. This

is the framework Jesus used for his own parable, of himself going to the Father to receive his kingdom, and if many in Jerusalem and Judea opposing his reign, futilely.

The kingdom as depicted here is a realm of future activity, responsibility, and opportunity. Those who do well with the Master's goods while he is away will receive more opportunity and responsibility in the fullness of his kingdom. A key idea to take away from the parable is the command of v13, "Engage in business until I come." Jesus' servants are supposed to use the resources he entrusts to us for his business. Recall 16:9.

The triumphal entry in Luke 19:28-40 is also found in Matthew 21:1ff, Mark 11:1ff, and John 12:12ff.

Borrowing the donkey colt from Bethany, Jesus could well expect that he was known there, as he'd been to the village many times and had been the guest of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. But there is a note of prophetic insight, as Jesus told the disciples what they would find and what would happen before they went to look.

Luke notes the ascent of the Mount of Olives from Jericho, and the descent heading westward toward Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives was the place highlighted in Ezekiel 11 that the glory of the Lord departed to when God abandoned the temple, and the place the glory of the Lord would come from to occupy the future temple.

Compare 19:38 with 2:14. The first "triumphal entry" was into the world and a human in the humblest of circumstances, the next into Jerusalem riding a donkey. There's one yet to come, when the glory and imposition of divine peace will be unmistakable, even to the stubbornly rebellious.

Several times in the gospels, and especially in Luke, the impending destruction of Jerusalem has been prophesied, as in 19:43-44, directly linked to refusing the Christ, Jesus, 19:42. When Luke wrote this gospel, about 60 AD, that doom was palpable, only a few years away, and the accumulated injustice and hostility had only grown worse, the opposite of divine peace in the physical city.

Notice in v44, the "time of your visitation." Recall Genesis 50:24-25, the same Greek word denotes God coming to deliver his people. Also note

Isaiah 10:3 where the Greek same Greek word is in the text, speaking of God coming in judgment.

The prophetic citation in 19:46 conflates the words of Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. Making animals available for sacrifice wasn't inherently wrong, but ancient Jewish sources (Josephus, the Talmud) aver that the priests in charge of the temple were engaged in dishonest commerce, forcing pilgrims to buy their wares from the merchants who enriched them and the flocks they themselves owned.

## Mark 11

When Mark tells the story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem as king on a donkey, the anticlimactic conclusion is striking, v11. "Hosanna!" should have been the welcome cry for the king of the nation, but when he reached the city and the temple it was business as usual, no inauguration ceremony.

The step by step time line Mark provides for Sunday-Monday, the ride to Jerusalem, the return to Bethany, cursing the fig tree the next morning, the confrontation at the temple, the return to Bethany in the dark, and the dead fig tree the next morning, is both dramatic and deliberate, we see Jesus' intentionality quite clearly in what he does and doesn't do, what he shows his disciples.

Note that Passover is too early for ripe figs, though there should be early figs forming by that time. The fig tree has been a prophetic sign for Israel several times, and perhaps there is a link here all the way back to the first sin in the garden (Genesis 3:7). Figs and fig trees symbolized God's blessings for Israel (Numbers 13:23, Deuteronomy 8:8) and his expectations for her to bear fruit.

Note v18, Mark has many comments about the reactions of disciples, crowds, and opponents to Jesus' words and deeds.

The dead fig tree highlights faith, and in a sense being thoughtful of what we ask for. Jesus could have asked for legions of angels, he could have cursed his opponents. The "cleansing" of the temple was a teaching moment, not the curse he could have called down.

Mark 11:32 puts the rulers among the Jews into the same category of failure as King Saul, 1 Samuel 14:44-45, 15:24.

## John 12

John 12 is John's overview of Jesus' final week in Jerusalem and its vicinity. Jesus had come to Bethany on the eastern brow of the Mt of Olives from Jericho. At Bethany Jesus had friends, particularly Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. At a meal, apparently on Saturday evening after Sabbath, Jesus was guest of honor and Martha served (recall Luke 10:38ff). Mary was once again at Jesus' feet, this time anointing his with expensive perfume. Mary is mentioned by name 3 times in the gospels, and each time she is at Jesus' feet. Matthew and Mark both report that she anointed his head, which is no doubt also true, there was plenty of perfume, and it was completely appropriate in the circumstances, but John focused on the anointing of the feet and wiping with her hair. Six days later at the Passover meal Jesus was in turn going to wash the feet of his disciples, eliciting confusion on their part.

Jesus equated Mary's generous gift of love with his rapidly approaching burial, and by its proximity we can also connect this anointing with him being the Christ, anointed by God with the Holy Spirit when he was baptized, and anointed by a faithful woman (he was the seed of woman) just before he rode the donkey into Jerusalem as king apparent.

Meanwhile Judas complained, and this incident was the tipping point for him as he renounced all that he knew to be true and right and good and bargained for Jesus' life, frustrated at missing an opportunity to steal from the common purse.

In the circumstances of large crowds of pilgrims moving toward Jerusalem for Passover, the presence of Jesus and Lazarus was a sideshow attraction, but with the effect that many onlookers came away convinced Jesus was the real deal. Lazarus thus became a target of the ire of the professional clergy, though he certainly had done nothing wrong.

John, like the other gospels, connects the donkey ride to Jerusalem with Zechariah 9:9, and as in 2:22 remarks that the disciples didn't put it all together until later, after Jesus was glorified.

Evidence, like the raising of Lazarus, was persuading people to believe in Jesus, but that same evidence was frustrating the Pharisees who opposed him despite the evidence.

The Greeks in v20 would have been Greek speaking Jews from the scattered Jews among the nations. Philip and Andrew were the 2 named in John 1 who promptly followed Jesus and also brought someone else to Jesus. They were still bringing people to Jesus, but now “the hour has come” Jesus said (v23) when new life would come out of death. Jesus was about to take his kingdom by force and be enthroned, but not in the way anyone expected.

Jesus contended with dread of what lay ahead, v27ff, but was determined to do the Father’s will. As at his baptism and on the mountain when he was changed for a time, once again a voice from heaven acknowledged Jesus.

The climactic battle was about to occur, between the ruler of this world and the Son of Man, v30-32. Dying on the cross was the means of overcoming the one who brought death into the world and freeing those enslaved by the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14ff). v31 is paralleled in Revelation 12:7-11. Only by being lifted up on the cross could Jesus “draw all men” to himself. He literally does draw all men. Some to share his glory in the light, others to be condemned in darkness.

John cited Isaiah 53:1 and 6:10, the suffering servant and the commissioning of the prophet before the throne of glory. Isaiah had just said, “Here am I, send me.” His mission had seemed futile, but he successfully did God’s work in a hostile world, as Jesus did even more so.

Which glory will it be? That’s a question for everyone.

Jesus proclaimed his divine authority to judge the world, the living and the dead, in John 5:21-29. Here he says that judgment is found in his words, doing or not doing his word is what judgment is all about, John 12:47-50. God’s “commandment is eternal life.”

Matthew 22

In Matthew 22 Jesus is continuing to teach in the temple courts in the

last week of his mortal life.

The wedding feast as a depiction of the onset of the kingdom of heaven harks back to various Old Testament portrayals, including Psalm 45. The theme was carried forward by John the Baptist (John 3:29), was used by Jesus in parables and metaphors, turns up in the New Testament letters (see Ephesians 5:22ff), and finally is thematic in Revelation (especially 19:6-10).

v7 was a direct warning to Jerusalem of what lay ahead after they rejected the bridegroom and abused his servants.

The first invitation to come into the feast went to a select group, the descendants of Abraham, but the invitation the was extended literally to everyone. For the wedding garment, consider Ephesians 5:25-27 and Revelation 6:11, 19:8. Collectively, the church is the bride of Christ. Individually, Christians are invited guests at the wedding supper.

The Pharisees and Herodians (22:15-16) were political opponents, basically taking opposite sides on the question presented to Jesus. They could agree to oppose Jesus. The goal wasn't resolution, but entrapment, hoping to get Jesus to either alienate the people or get in trouble with Roman authorities. The question of likeness should remind us of Genesis 1:26-27. The government has a right to collect taxes (see also Romans 13:7), even a heavy handed and corrupt government like Rome over Judea, but our being, our loyalties and very identity, belong to God.

Jesus clearly taught that according to the scriptures, v29, the Law of Moses which the Sadducees nominally accepted, existence continues beyond the grave, and those who have died in faith will live with God in the resurrection. Resurrection life will be a continuation of personality, as with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but the resurrection life being unending will not be a mere extension of what we experience in this world.

The greatest and 2<sup>nd</sup> commandments as taught in v34-40 are reiterated again and again in the Bible as the basis for all obedience and service to God. They are the basis for moral behavior and holiness, and undergird all the commandments of the Law as well as defining the Christian's life and behavior.

In v41-46, the question to the Pharisees upset their Christology. How could one in the house of David be greater than David, the head of the house? This was more of a conundrum for them than for us, with their perspective on genealogies and patriarchy. Paul also referenced Psalm 110:1 in conjunction with Psalm 8:6 in 1 Corinthians 15:25-28. Jesus is both David's son/heir and his Lord.

## Mark 12

The parable of the tenants in Mark 12:1-12 was in Matthew 21:33-46, and Luke 20:9-19. It was a parable that Jesus' opponents readily understood and resented (12:12). Ironically, in their resentment they wanted to do exactly what the parable predicted they would do.

The aim of the conspiracy of Pharisees and Herodians, who strongly opposed each other, is explicitly stated in 12:13. The world is full of conflicts, but the worldly often comes together in opposition to the godly.

The dialogue with the Sadducees and what they thought was a clever paradox ended with Jesus saying "you are quite wrong" because they willfully ignored the scriptures (v24). They ignored most of the scriptures, accepting on the Law, and didn't honestly read or follow what they claimed to accept. Their god was distant and uninvolved in the ordinary business of life, kept in a convenient box for their convenient use as needed.

Resurrection life will be "like the angels in heaven" but not becoming angels. Humans and angels are and always will be different kinds. See Hebrews 2:5, 16.

Mark's record of the conversation about the greatest commandment (12:28-34, paralleling Matthew 22:34-40) includes Jesus' approval of the man who asked the question, and then responded to Jesus' answer with wisdom gleaned from the scriptures.

While Jesus' opponents didn't like the outcomes of their encounters with him, the multitude of people did, v37.

Mark's brief mention of Jesus' diatribe against the religious leaders in 38-40 is presented at greater length in Matthew 23.

The widow's offering, Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4, stands in contrast to the wealthy and powerful men who "devour widow's houses" in v40. Her gift was from the heart, and not for show. According to Josephus, the collection boxes at the temple had a belled sort of metal funnel on top, rather like a trumpet (Matthew 6:2), into which people cast their coins. The funnel channeled the coins into the box, and also prevented anyone from reaching in to steal. There was an added effect of ringing loudly whenever the rich threw in their coins, with different notes for coins of gold or silver or bronze or copper, large or small, many or few. The widow's tiny coins made very little noise, but the Lord noticed.

### Matthew 23

Matthew 23 is a scathing rebuke of the religious leaders for their hypocrisy. Most of Jesus' words here are only found in Matthew, but v1-7 are summarized in Mark 12:38-39 and Luke 20:45-46, there are some parallels in Luke 11:37-44, and v37-39 are paralleled in Luke 13:34-35.

To the extent that the scribes and Pharisees communicated the Law (v3) they were to be listened to, but not imitated.

v8-11 instructs the disciples of Jesus not to be self-seeking, but rather to serve others. Religious titles, hierarchy, and special clothing, tend to reflect values and appetites of human nature that don't fit the aims of the kingdom of God.

Seven times Jesus says "woe to you" in these verses (13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29), addressing those who seemed to be most religious among the Jews. By their manmade rules and traditions and lack of care and mercy for others they hindered entrance into the kingdom of heaven and brought condemnation upon themselves.

In his chastening of the unrighteous shepherds of God's flock, Jesus again alluded to the destruction of Jerusalem and their way of life in that generation, v36. The claim that "I send you prophets" in v34 and the allusion to himself as a mother hen in v37-39 clearly identifies Jesus with the LORD in the Old Testament.

### Luke 20-21

Luke 20:1-21:4 substantially parallels Matthew 21:23-23:7 and Mark 11:27-12:44.

In Jesus' response to the Sadducees (20:27-40) Jesus used the phrase "sons of God" in reference to the "sons of the resurrection," those who are worthy of the glory of resurrection life. Being "sons of God" is connected with being "equal to angels" some of whom are called "sons of God" in Job 1.

Luke 21:5-36 parallels Matthew 24 and Mark 13. When some of the disciples were admiring the splendor of Herod's temple buildings, Jesus predicted their complete destruction, which literally happened 40 years later in 70 AD. That provoked some questions about the time and what to watch for. Jesus replied with a general overview of what the church experiences in this world, v5-19 deal with the scope of troubles in this world, and the impact on the disciples. Nothing in those verses is presented as a sign of the end, rather these things are to be expected in this world. v13 is a fundamental Christian attitude toward "crises" in this world.

Luke 21:20-24 moves from the overview of how the world will behave to the actual destruction of Jerusalem, directing the disciples to get out before the cataclysm unfolds. The words of the prophets would be fulfilled, and the world would be shaken by the events that transpired. v24 mentions "the times of the nations" which again is not a sign or portent but an allusion to God's purposes in patiently waiting for repentance that all who can be saved will be saved.

v25-28 foretells the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming with both encouragement and hope in v28. There's no time table here, but just when things seem worst God's people should be assured redemption is drawing near. When everything in the world seems to be out of control, it isn't, and Jesus will come as he departed on a cloud with power and glory. He's master of heaven and earth.

v31 is not saying his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming will be within a generation of anything in particular, but the onset of the kingdom and the destruction of Jerusalem, the taking up of Jesus on a cloud into glory, all of that was near, though the fulfilling of the times of the nations and the coming with power and great glory are at a time known we cannot foresee.

Key ideas in Luke 22 include v8, 34 don't be misled or discouraged; v13, crises are an opportunity to bear witness of faith in Jesus; v22, 33, the scriptures will be fulfilled, include God's wrath and kingdom; v27, Jesus will be seen (by everyone) when he returns in glory; v28, hold your head up, redemption draws near; v34-46, trials are certain, don't be "weighed down" but be alert and pray for strength, because Jesus is coming.

v37-38, Jesus followed a rigorous and demanding routine every day that week, and Judas knew the routine.

### Mark 13

Indeed, in terms of workmanship and materials, the temple buildings and the crafted stones they were made of were wonderful (v10). But from the Lord's perspective the wonder of human skill and the cost were wasted because unfaithfulness had blighted the premises. Consequently, every building on the temple grounds was destroyed, and every stone thrown down, as Jesus said they would be.

Only Mark names a specific group of 4 disciples having the conversation on the Mt of Olives, looking back at the temple on the opposite hill.

As with Luke's account of this dialogue (Luke 21:5ff), first Jesus gave an overview of what kingdom life was going to be like in this world, with false prophets, wars, natural disasters, and persecutions. These are the beginning of birth pains (v8, and see Romans 8:22). The nature of birth pains is to grow longer, stronger, and closer together as the birth gets closer. The principle of endurance in the face of any kind of opposition in v13 is a basic Biblical principle of faith.

v10 has a key part of the plan that the disciples did not yet comprehend, the good news going to all nations.

In v14 Jesus transitioned to the destruction of the temple, and Jerusalem, with a reference to Daniel 9:27 and Daniel 11:31, 12:11, the abomination causing desolation. Daniel's prophecy in 11:31 and 12:11 had seemed to be fulfilled in about 165 BC when Antiochus Epiphanes had desecrated the temple and attempted to squelch Judaism, but that was just a test run for the real thing. Jesus stressed how bad things would be at the

time of the Jewish rebellion, and indeed the whole Roman empire was wracked at that time with uprisings and civil war, but God limited the harm that was done (v19-20).

And indeterminate period after the destruction of temple Judaism, with great shaking of the human realm, the Lord will come again with “great power and glory” and harvest the earth. See also Isaiah 13:9-11. The Son of Man coming in the clouds is a reference to Daniel 7, which references both the ascension of the Son of Man to receive his kingdom, and his coming in victory for divine judgment.

v32 stresses the secret of the time when Jesus will return. As a human being in the flesh, Jesus did not know the time of his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, and he had no specific signs to offer. Only God the Father at that time knew the timing of that final unfolding of his will, the great day of the Lord. Not knowing the time of his return calls for watchfulness and being attentive to duty for all Jesus’ disciples, all the time.

## Matthew 24

Matthew 24-25 is the fifth and final lengthy discourse from Jesus presented by Matthew. It is themed to answer 3 questions the disciples asked as they sat on the western slope of the Mt of Olives and looked back at Jerusalem, with the temple directly across the Kidron Valley. Even more so than the parallel passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21 Jesus deals with apocalyptic scenes and symbolic references to his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming that are interwoven with scenes of the end of Jewish Jerusalem and the temple and sweeping descriptions of the flow of human history.

Matthew 24:3-14 describes the flow of history from that day until Jesus returns, with tumults of various kinds, misleading messages from false prophets, persecution, and always the need to keep on preaching the gospel to all nations until the end comes.

Matthew 24:15-28 focuses on the end of Temple Judaism with Judea and Jerusalem crushed by the Romans, climaxing in 70 AD. That would be (was) a time of great disorder, with conflicts all over the world that threatened to confuse the saints, if they did not take his warnings seriously. Especially the eschatological reminder that when he comes again it won’t look like that, the Romans destroying Jerusalem, rather it will be like a

lightning bolt, sudden and universal in v27. That event too will be a time of wrath and destruction for those who don't know the Lord, building on the language of Ezekiel 21:10, 15.

Matthew 24:29-31 does focus on the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming referenced in v27, that the very created order set in place in Genesis 1:14-19 would be convulsed before Jesus comes again. The shaking in v29 is primarily described as "the powers of heaven" which are referenced several times by Paul as in conflict with the church, as in Ephesians 6:12. Sadly, while the coming of the Son of Man should be cause for joy in the redemption of the creation, multitudes among the nations will mourn his return, and the consummation in judgment. Note that the return of Jesus, the mourning of the nations, and the gathering of the elect from everywhere are simultaneous, one event.

Matthew 24:32-35 shifts back from "after those days" in v29 to "these things" leading up to Jerusalem's destruction in v33, 34. The outcomes Jesus spoke of are irrevocable, transcending the existence of the creation itself.

Matthew 24:36-51 move from "these things" that were happening in that generation leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem to "that day and hour" when Jesus will come again. This is his answer to the "sign of your coming and of the end of the age" questions. In one sense, an age was ending with establishment of the kingdom of heaven and then the destruction of the temple, "these things," which that generation would see. But the final ending of the age is the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming which no one can predict, because no one has the necessary reference points to make such a prediction. Despite God's assessment of the wicked world in the days of Noah, or the culture of Sodom and Gomorrah, the people in both of those times of perversity went about business as usual, carrying on as though everything were normal. So shall it be when the Son of Man returns. Be alert, be ready for the coming of the Son of Man so that you will not be "swept away" like the multitudes who made up their own rules in the days of Noah and the cities around Sodom.

Again, as in many prophetic utterances, the kingdom of heaven is not pictured in static terms, but as a thriving household, a busy enterprise, both before and after the Lord returns. Be productively busy in the kingdom now, and expect to be productively busy in the future the Lord has prepared. This discourse continues from the parable of the faithful servant in 24:45ff

into the parables of the 10 virgins, the talents, and the sheep and goats in chapter 25.

## Matthew 25

Matthew 25 continues Jesus' discourse with his disciples on the Mt of Olives about the destruction of Jerusalem and his "coming" and the "end of the age." In chapter 24 Jesus talked about both the end of temple Judaism when Jerusalem was destroyed 40 years later, and the confusion many would experience about the working out of God's plan. He taught patient endurance and upholding the testimony of his name with faith in all circumstances, including great tribulation. He warned of false prophets who would mislead many. He taught that the timing of the end, his own second coming, was known only to the Father himself, and so the Lord's people should be ready at all times. Chapter 25 continues that theme of being ready for the Lord's return with 3 parables. Each of the 3 is about living every day with an expectation of the Lord's imminent return.

The parable of the 10 virgins describes a group of intended to participate in a wedding. All 10 planned to be at the wedding. However, 5 thought ahead and brought plenty of oil, while the other 5 didn't bring extra oil. Though it isn't obvious in most English translations, the word for "lamps" in these verses is used for big lamps, torches that burn brightly and use a lot of oil. This Greek word for lamp/torch is found in this parable, and in John 18:3, Acts 20:8, and Revelation 4:5, 8:10. In the Greek Old Testament this is the word for the torch Abram saw in Genesis 15:17 and the torches of Gideon's 300 men in Judges 7:16, 20. The same word is in the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 62:1 and Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim bearing God's throne in Ezekiel 1:13. We should associate the torches in Jesus' parable with divine power, and particularly the Holy Spirit. The 5 foolish virgins weren't really committed to living in/by the Spirit who gives life. We need to live by the Spirit so that awake or asleep when the Lord comes we'll be prepared.

The parable of the talents similarly casts the citizenship in kingdom of heaven as a life of service to the master who is journeying, and has entrusted his property to his servants, to us, with an expectation of putting it to good use. Whatever we are, whatever we have, belongs to the Lord and should be used for his kingdom and his glory. Again, the focus on the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming says there will be two very different outcomes for the productive

and the unproductive, those who try and those who don't even try. As with the virgins in the previous parable, there aren't any "unbelievers" in this story, just people who know what they ought to do and either do it or not. Exile from the presence of the Master is the place of misery described in v30. We have no basis for comparison, living in a world constantly attended to by God who is seen at the least in nature's order and beauty, to consider a place empty of God's presence, utterly separated from God.

The parable of separation in 25:31-46 conveys a similar message to the previous parables, live your life as an heir of the kingdom of heaven. Put Matthew 5-7 into practice. Help the helpless, show mercy and kindness, live a life of love in action. The acts of righteousness listed here as done or not done aren't great challenges, they're everyday matters of caring for the human beings we encounter and treating them the way we'd want to be treated.

In driving home the primary point of living kingdom lives in this world until he comes, Jesus makes several noteworthy statements.

Note the connection of 25:31 back to 24:30-31.

Note who the judge is, and where he is in v31. This is the same scene as Revelation 20:11ff and Daniel 7:9-14, 22, 26-27.

Note that sheep and goats are quite distinctive, yet come from the same created kind and can hybridize. Those who stand before the throne are all of the same heritage, humans made in the image of God, but have followed different paths and have distinctive natures even when side by side. Note that the separation is binary, there aren't other choices. It's sheep or goats, left or right, reward or punishment.

Note that the heirs of the kingdom are sharing in a kingdom prepared before creation began in v34. God always intended to welcome people into his presence for full participation in his kingdom.

Note again the kinds of deeds the Lord considers heroic in kingdom terms.

Note that the destination elsewhere described as the lake of fire and the 2<sup>nd</sup> death and hell (Gehenna) is pictured as "prepared for the devil and his angels" in v41. Before there was an adversary (devil) there was no eternal fire. Once there was a devil and his allies, a place was prepared for them, and humans who choose the god of this world share in his fate.

Note the "you who are cursed" in 41. In Genesis 3 neither the man nor the woman was cursed. The serpent was cursed, and the ground was cursed for man's sake. We become like what we follow.

Note that the same word (eternal) is used in v41 and 46 for fire and punishment, and in 46 for life. It's either eternal punishment or else eternal life, and what we prioritize (the 10 virgins) and what we do with the Lord's resources (the talents) and what do for others (sheep and goats) matters in determining that outcome for each of us.

## Matthew 26

Matthew 26 covers substantially the same ground as Mark 14 and Luke 22, and the same time frame with some overlap in John 12-13. Each writer highlights some different details.

The first few lines of Matthew 26 wrap up the discourse of chapters 24-25. The Olivet Discourse took place 2 days before the Passover, when Jesus would die on the cross. Apparently this was Tuesday evening, as we reckon days, the beginning of Wednesday for Jewish calendars.

The rulers were plotting, v3, but Jesus has already consistently foretold the circumstances according to the prophets and the will of God. The rulers aren't in control.

The high priest Annas had been deposed by the Romans in 15 AD and nominally replaced by his son-in-law Caiaphas. Annas relinquished the title but not the prestige and influence. See also John 18:13, 19; 11:49; Luke 3:2; Acts 4:6. Altogether Annas had 5 of his sons and son-in-law in the office of high priest.

It's a rather sad commentary on the times that the high priest had a palace.

The Bible writers often present events with thematic links that are not chronological. Connective words like "then" in v3 or "now" in v6 are often not chronological indicators, but connective tissue in the narrative.

25:6-16, the anointing of Jesus at Bethany, according to John's chronology (John 12:1-8), had taken place 4 days earlier in Bethany, immediately before the triumphal donkey ride, at the meal where Martha served and Lazarus was another guest. Simon the leper may have been a relative of the Lazarus family, possibly the father of the siblings, and this may have been the family home, but we can only guess. We can also

guess reasonably that Simon had suffered leprosy for a long time, thus the nickname, and had been healed by Jesus. Mary is identified by name in John but not by Matthew or Mark. John emphasized the anointing of Jesus' feet and wiping with Mary's hair, while Matthew and Mark highlight the ointment being poured on Jesus' head. No doubt with the amount of expensive ointment being poured out she anointed both head and feet, and John emphasized the service of foot-washing while Matthew and Mark emphasized the royal dignity of the head. High priests and kings were generally anointed with oil poured on the head. Note that a "beautiful thing" done for Jesus is never a waste. Recall the preceding lesson in Matthew 25:35-40.

Only Mary, the woman, saw the moment in a context that called for great gifts. The disciples, discerning neither the times nor the Master's mood, complained about the "waste." Her gift was memorable for the ages. That's an emphasis Matthew provides. Who she was is less important than what she did and why she did it.

Without the explanation that Judas was thief, noted by John, Matthew also linked his indignation about the ointment to his decision to sell Jesus to his enemies. The 30 pieces of silver is the price of a slave, reflecting the sale of Joseph by his brothers (back then it was 20 pieces of silver) and the prophecy of Zechariah 11:12-13.

The Passover meal was prepared, as instructed, in a house in Jerusalem. The number of disciples present included the 12 specifically, perhaps some others (considering Acts 1:21-22).

Note Jesus identified himself as "The Teacher."

The implication in v20ff is that the meal being eaten was the Passover, v19. For v23 consider Psalm 41:9, a friend who shares bread is the betrayer.

Some have read detailed descriptions of Jewish Passover customs involving various rituals not in the Bible, including a series of cups and prayers. None of those details are available from the Bible, nor from any Jewish writings until long after the temple had been destroyed. No one knows exactly what transpired at a Passover meal in Jesus' generation beyond what the Bible itself tells us. Most customs of the Rabbinic Jewish Passover Seder practiced now developed over the centuries after the

temple was destroyed. We know they had roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs on the table. We know they had fruit of the vine because it is specifically mentioned. We know there was some kind of dip, because that is mentioned as well. Other ingredients and/or ceremonies that some would add to the event that night are speculation.

Again in v24, "it is written." Jesus was following a plan recorded in the scriptures.

Judas and Jesus knew the truth of what Judas had already set in motion. The others were oblivious.

Perhaps we should note Jesus' language in v26-28 and imitate what he said when blessing the bread and fruit of the vine for our remembrance. Jesus didn't use words like "emblem" or "symbol," and we might do well to imitate him in our own choice of words.

The covenant, v28, this is the ratification of the new covenant promised through Jeremiah (31:31ff). The core purpose Jesus' of death is stated in v28. "... in my Father's kingdom ..." did he mean the wedding supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6ff) or did he mean during the 40 days of appearances after his resurrection (Acts 10:41) or did he mean sharing with the assembled church (1 Corinthians 10:16-22, 11:23-34)? Perhaps all of the above.

They sung a hymn.

Out to the mount of Olives... omitting the dialogue John and prayer reports in John 13-17. Jesus had gone there every night that week, pausing to pray before continuing to Bethany.

Jesus foretold the crisis of confidence for all the disciples. Peter in particular insisted he would not fall away (Luke adds more details here), but they all said it. The Lord foretold exactly how it would go for Peter, demonstrating yet again his being "the Prophet" who was to come.

Gethsemane is an Aramaic (Hebrew) term meaning "oil press." Jesus himself was about to be crushed that the oil of the Spirit might flow. John mentions that in that location was a garden (18:1). Peter, James, and John were again singled out to go with Jesus a little farther. Jesus' prayers were

abject, face to the ground, groaning with anguish. He did not want to do what was next, but he yielded to the Father's will. He understood the fatigue and weakness of the disciples who once again fell short in the garden, but he himself did not yield. Three times he prayed ardently. The situation didn't change, but he needed the prayers to handle the situation.

Betrayed with a kiss, again the mark of a friend, a gesture of affection, delivered surely with an intent to mock. An ironic backwards nod to Psalm 2:12.

No swords in Jesus' cause or for his kingdom, v52. He could call for forces mankind could not withstand to defeat all opposition (12 legions of angels = about 60,000 in Roman terms), but that sort of conquest of evil would not have resolved the predicament of sin and separation from God.

As foretold, the disciples fled. They didn't understand this kind of war, even after 3 years of mentoring by the Teacher.

Jesus wasn't having a real trial before the high priest and his associates. They wanted to find evidence to present at a trial, but found nothing useful. However, when Caiaphas made a lawful demand for testimony Jesus obeyed the Law rather than the man, and affirmed by reference to Daniel 7 that he himself was that divine figure presented as the Son of Man. Jesus was to fulfill that prophecy initially by ascending on a cloud to the throne of God, and finally by coming again on the clouds in all his power and glory. Claiming that prophecy pushed the high priest and his cronies over the edge, though their reaction was surely theatrical rather than genuine. Their behavior toward Jesus in v66-68 certainly was contrary to the Law and clearly wickedly ungodly.

Peter meanwhile was observing the proceedings as best he could from a distance in the courtyard outside the mansion. As Jesus had predicted Peter was challenged 3 times, and denied Jesus 3 times. In the dark of the early morning Peter heard the rooster crow and remembered the night before and Jesus' warning, and he wept bitterly. He certainly felt like a failure in the midst of his confusion and grief.

Mark 14

Mark 14 follows substantially the same outline as Matthew 26.

Nard, v3, was an import from India, sealed into containers carved from stone for shipping the long distance.

“And they scolded her” v5. Jesus would have none of that, and chastened the grumblers while commending the kind and generous gift and blessing he received.

The means of finding the place where they would eat the Passover (v13-16) highlighted Jesus as a prophet. He said things would happen a certain way, and they happened that way, showing the disciples again that he was a true prophet of God.

As also in Matthew, Jesus referenced Zechariah 13:7 (Mark 14:27), the same context as the prophecy of the betrayal for 30 pieces of silver. And again he foretold his own resurrection, which went right over their heads. Jesus foretold a gathering in Galilee where they would come together after his suffering and resurrection. Mark’s detail about the crowing in v30 highlights Peter’s perspective as recorded by the younger disciple. Likewise the focus on Peter in v37.

The young man in Mark 14:51-52 has been the source of much speculation. We can only guess, but what seems most likely is that Mark briefly mentioned his own humiliating experience that night. Later in Acts 12 we see that Mark’s mother had an apparently large home with at least one servant, suggesting some measure of wealth, as does a linen garment.

“And he broke down and wept.” It was a shattering series of events for the disciples, witnessing what seemed to them to be the failure of all their hopes, and seeing themselves as failures for their lack of courage and faith in the face of opposition. A wretched end, as they thought then, to all the promises and hope they’d embraced for 3 years.

## Luke 22

Luke 22 largely parallels Mark 14 and Matthew 26 but there are differences related to emphasis and the original audience. Defining the Feast of Unleavened Bread as the Passover, for example, suggest a much less Jewish original audience than Matthew.

Judas Iscariot was open, by his own dishonesty, anger, and temperament, to the influence of the adversary, and so Satan entered into him. This suggests more than mere temptation.

Luke names the disciples who prepared for the Passover meal. Luke specified the day as the day of sacrificing the lamb (Abib 14 from Exodus 12). The prophetic nature of the instructions given is highlighted. The meal prepared was the Passover meal.

Jesus was about to complete the cycle that had begun with Passover, God making a new nation, and had desired to share that event with the disciples. It's a remarkable reference to human nature that even that night the disciples squabbled about who was greatest among them. Jesus used the setting to present himself as one who serves, and John 13 shows how he literally acted out that theme.

The kingdom assigned in v28 was about to be inaugurated. The ruling authority of the apostles as judges on thrones would be inaugurated as well, not just in terms of final judgment but rather in terms of their role from Acts 2 onward. This is part of the Daniel 7 prophecy, thrones being set in place.

v31 has Jesus singling out Peter, but the first "you" (and the second) is plural, all of you, while the "you" in v32 is singular, Peter in particular. Peter and all of them would wobble, but Peter would need to come back strong to help the rest.

v35 has to be read as warning of troubles ahead, but not literal instructions. When the disciples happily answered that they had 2 swords, Jesus said, "That's enough," indicating that they missed the point. He clearly didn't want an armed group in that sense, and would only deplore violence as a means to advancing his kingdom after, as he always had before (see v49-53, John 18:36, and Matthew 26:52-53).

v39 highlights the regularity of what Jesus had been doing each day, so that Judas knew exactly where to find him in the dark of night.

v43 indicates divine help, in line with, for example, the help given to Daniel in Daniel 7 or the help given to Elijah in route to Mt Sinai in 1 Kings 19. But he still had to carry on.

v44 is one of only 3 times the Bible mentions sweat. We should connect this to the first time, Genesis 3:19, when the ground was cursed because of sin and food would only come by the sweat of man's brow. Now the failure in the garden and the curse are being cured, as Jesus prays in another garden. The condition, called hemosiderosis, sweating blood, is associated with great distress, stress so severe the capillaries under the skin rupture.

All four gospels report the disciple cutting off the servant's ear, as in Luke 22:50. Only Luke records the healing. The greater point for the others was the error of thinking one could fight for Jesus with swords, which Luke has too, but for the physician who emphasized the tender heart of Jesus toward the weak, his mercy toward this adversary could not be overlooked.

Luke summarized the political shenanigans of the night, but did not omit the "confession" of Jesus in v69 (from Daniel 7) which they understood as an assertion of personal divinity.

### John 13

The opening of John 13 puts us in the same time and place as the "last supper" Passover meal recorded by the other 3 gospels. John focused though on the love of Jesus demonstrated for the disciples, and not the introduction of what we know as the Lord's supper. John gives us overall a much longer account of other things that happened that night, the night of His betrayal.

v2 notes what Luke had stated in 22:3.

The foot washing was an interruption to the supper, and we have him back at the table in v23ff.

The point of the foot washing was not a ritual to be performed, but rather acting out what Luke 22:27 stated succinctly. Jesus came to serve, in humility, and that's what his disciples must do for each other. If there happens to be a need to wash another's feet, do that, and whatever other services may be helpful to others, and especially other disciples.

Jesus washed Judas's feet, v11.

The principle of divine authority reported in Luke 22 as “12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel” is also stressed here, as in v20.

The reference to Judas in v27 is more explicit than the mention of one who dipped in the same bowl in the other gospels, but was still generally missed by the other disciples, who generally missed the point of Jesus’ act and Judas’s departure.

Note v2 and v27. Influenced by the devil, and then open to his direction. It’s a cold heart that can do what Judas proceeded to do after Jesus treated him as he did, even on that night. Very likely Judas despised the “master” washing the disciples’ feet, even when Jesus clearly showed the man he knew what was happening, what Judas had decided to do.

John 13 emphasizes the imminence of Jesus glory, the path to the throne being a Roman cross. The “new command” in v34 wasn’t new in the sense of “love one another,” that was long standing, it was “as I have loved you” that raised the bar on what love is. Jesus laid down his life for us, washed the feet of the disciples, called his people to do the same for one another.

Peter of course immediately said he would lay down his life for Jesus, and eventually he did, but he wasn’t actually ready to do that yet, not in the right way.

#### John 14-17

Jesus’ dialogue with his disciples on the night of his betrayal is in the context of the “last supper” in chapter 13, and continues through chapter 16, concluding with the Lord’s prayer in 17.

In this discourse Jesus identified himself as “the way, the truth, and the life.” He is the only access to the Father (recall John 1:51), and there is no life apart from him, the revelation of divine truth. He fulfills Isaiah 36:8 and many other prophecies.

Jesus promised great power for his heirs, those who believe in him and come to God in his name (14:12-14).

Jesus strongly correlated love and obeying his commandments in 14:15

and repeatedly. He's not talking about mere obedience to rules, but treasuring his word and following it. Accomplishing that calls for the help of the Holy Spirit who would come from the Father at Jesus' request (14:16). Jesus is the truth (v6) and the Helper is the Spirit of truth (v17).

The Holy Spirit as helper would teach the disciples (14:26) and help them remember what Jesus said. A clear example of this progression is seen in Peter's preaching of the gospel to the gentiles in Acts 10. Even though that was taught in the Law and the Prophets and by Jesus the Good Shepherd, Peter had to be taught what God always meant. The chosen apostles had the Spirit in greater measure than other disciples (consider John 3:34, Ephesians 4:7, 1 Corinthians 12:28ff), but the Spirit as Helper still works in the disciples of Jesus.

Jesus as the true vine (15:1) fulfills the mandate given to Israel (see Jeremiah 2:21, Ezekiel 15:1ff). He's what the vine is supposed to be, designed to be. And his disciples are nourished by his root in order to be fruitful. Vines require pruning to be fruitful, and even fruitful branches need to be cleaned up. The Father has been gardener/vinedresser for all of human existence (consider Isa 10:33), and continues to chasten and discipline, as well as to judge and purge. Success in fruitfulness requires living in Christ, depending on him rather than ourselves.

The commandment to love as Jesus has loved us is reiterated several times, including 15:12, with Jesus using himself as the defining example of love and friendship.

If the Lord didn't choose us, we would have no opportunity to choose him (15:16). We can only come to Christ because he has invited us to come.

Jesus promised peace (14:27) but warned of persecution and tribulation in this world (15:18ff).

The specific witness of the apostles (15:27) is accompanied by the testimony of the Holy Spirit (15:26).

There was a risk of the apostles not staying the course, of falling away (16:1). Jesus last assurances on the night of his betrayal was to equip them for what lay ahead.

The Holy Spirit helps disciples, and convicts unbelievers (16:8-11). The “sharp and lively” word of God (Hebrews 4:12) is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). When the apostles’ audience was “cut to the heart” in Acts 2:37, that looks like an example of what Jesus said the Spirit would do in the world.

Jesus has repeatedly referred to the devil as “the ruler of this world” as in 16:11. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was the basis of judgment falling upon him.

The Spirit glorifies Jesus. Guiding disciples to “all truth” and Jesus being “the way, the truth, and the life,” the work of the Spirit necessarily highlights the glory of Jesus. (16:14)

The name of Jesus is powerful and important for those who believe in him (16:23-24). Prayer is through Jesus’ name.

The final word in 16:33, “take heart, I have overcome the world.” Hours later he would be dead, but he knew what he was talking about.

There are many important concepts in the prayer of John 17, including the eternal relationship of the Father and the Son. They loved one another before creation, they shared glory before the creation. Jesus’ disciples share in the divine love, and participate in His glory. The relationship of Father and Son defines the relationship of Christian to Christian. Distinct, but completely harmonious.

### Matthew 27

Matthew 27:1 moves the scene from the palace of Caiaphas to an early morning meeting of the council, for an official request to execute Jesus. The Jewish rulers could not generally execute those they condemned without Roman approval.

Judas wanted to change the outcome of his betrayal... who knows what he imagined the outcome might be, but he wasn’t happy with the results. Nevertheless, his admission of wrong doing fell on deaf ears among the professional clergy he’d dealt with, and in despair he took his own life. Peter or Luke in Acts 1:18-19 graphically describes his self-destruction in terms that may refer more to turmoil of his inward being than the way he died. While Judas had remorse, the path he followed did not indicate

repentance, only regret. See 2 Corinthians 7:10.

The prophecy in v8-10 conflates elements from Jeremiah 19:1-13 and Zechariah 11:13. The context of Jeremiah's prophecy foretold divine judgment on Jerusalem's idolatry and sins, and that in Zechariah the end of the covenant God had made with Judah and Israel. Jesus fulfilled the covenant and closed the era of worship at the contaminated physical temple.

Pilate (v2, v11) was governor of Judea from 26-36 AD. His primary residence was in Caesarea, and in Jerusalem he occupied the palace built by Herod the Great. His presence in Jerusalem probably was due to Passover, and no doubt included additional soldiers (v27).

John 18:28ff includes more of the exchange between Jesus and Pilate than Matthew or the other writers. Jesus demeanor before the governor amazed him.

v18 asserts that Pilate understood the politics of the situation. And he didn't especially want to be a pawn of the Jewish rulers. Nevertheless, this particular mob was maneuvered by the professional religious leaders to demand Jesus' death, and Pilate yielded, though he knew Jesus was not a criminal.

Pilate's wife had a troubling dream about Jesus, v19. Modernists tend to dismiss dreams as products of human minds and experiences, but historically some striking dreams have been considered important. Here we should remember that Joseph experienced dreams in Matthew 1-2 that helped him make important decisions, and so did the wise men in Matthew 2. Matthew gives no claim that Pilate's wife was a godly woman or was visited by an angel, but the dream was important enough to recall in context.

When Pilate didn't manage the situation according to his thoughts, and saw trouble brewing, he handed off the crucifixion with a parody of Jewish hand washing rituals. Such a stunt did not relieve his responsibility, and neither did the answer of the crowd.

The scarlet robe in v28 was probably a faded and worn out legionnaire's cloak, mimicking a royal purple robe (see Mark 15:17). Jesus

had already experienced some rough handling in the garden (Matthew 26:50, 57) and in the palace of Caiaphas (26:67). Then he was scourged (27:26), and next the Roman soldiers en masse (27:27-31) brutalized him for their own entertainment. He'd been through hours of torture and humiliation before the crucifixion itself.

The ridicule of the soldiers was a parody of the reception Jesus should have had in Jerusalem and specifically at the temple the previous first day of the week when he rode the donkey into town.

The crown of thorns on his head and his death on a tree (the cross is frequently referred to as a tree, as in Galatians 3:13) should remind us of the first human sin and subsequent curse in Genesis 3.

The fact that Simon of Cyrene (in North Africa) is remembered by name (and see Mark 15:21) suggests the man became a disciple, and his family was known in the church. Golgotha is a Hebrew/Aramaic name, whose meaning is given by Matthew. Luke on the other hand just used the Greek word for "skull" but the KJV in Luke 23:33 inserted the Latin word for skull, "calvary," instead of translating the Greek word Luke used.

There is no suggestion that Golgotha was a hill or mountain, as so often depicted in art and song. It was in fact probably directly west of the temple, on Mt Moriah, alongside a well-used road where lots of people coming and going would see the crucified men.

The mockery directed against Jesus said nothing of bad behavior or crimes. He was guilty of none. He was mocked for doing good and speaking truth. The "we will believe" claim in v42 was a lie, they'd already chosen to ignore a myriad of signs and prophetic fulfillments.

Initially, the robbers mocked Jesus too. It's amazing, in a sad way, how dehumanizing someone else can make a Roman soldier or a crucified criminal somehow feel better about themselves.

From about noon until 3:00 there was darkness, a puzzling darkness mentioned in other ancient historical sources. Three hours of darkness here, 3 days of darkness in the 9<sup>th</sup> plague. Both were followed by the death of the firstborn, the first Israelite Passover.

The 4 gospels record a total of 7 things Jesus said from the cross. One of them is here in v46, Jesus quoting Psalm 22:1. As when he confronted the devil in Matthew 4, he brought the word into this challenge as well.

No human could have accomplished tearing the heavy veil of the temple, and especially not from top to bottom, as it was more than 3 times the height of a man. The torn veil revealed an empty room, no ark and no holy presence there. The mockery of v40 was shown for the empty jesting it was. The Lord was literally done with the temple and the mockeries of God's commandments occurring there day after day.

Only Matthew mentions the opening of tombs in v52 , and the raising of dead saints, apparently "after his resurrection". Probably people who were recently deceased and known to others in the city, but other than a sign of Jesus' triumph over death we don't know much about the miracle. Probably like Lazarus and others raised from the dead they resumed life and died again later. Or else they were included in the phrase Paul used in Ephesians 4:8 about a host of captives. But I suspect the Lazarus experience is more likely, especially since Matthew uses one verb for the raising of the bodies in v52 and a dramatically different word for Jesus' resurrection in v53. This was a sign of Jesus' victory over death and Hades, but not the resurrection of the dead, except for himself, the first fruits.

A rock hewn tomb was a very expensive gift, given by Joseph. Note that Jesus mortal story begins as the nominal son and heir of Joseph, the son of Jacob, in chapter 1, and ends with his burial on the tomb of Joseph. The Bible describes two empty tombs. Both are the tomb of Joseph.

The day after the day of preparation (Friday) is Sabbath (Saturday). Concerned about a possible fraud, the authors of fraud approached Pilate for a guard. He authorized their action in mocking tones. It is apparent Jesus' enemies knew what he'd been teaching, and rejected it.

## Mark 15

Substantially paralleling Matthew's account of Jesus' suffering in Matthew 27, Mark includes a few details not found there. We have, for

example, more of a description of who Barabbas was and what he'd done in v7. There is irony in the name of the criminal, Bar-abbas means the father's son.

The cohort of soldiers (or battalion) mentioned in v16 was about 1/10 of a legion, 600 soldiers. More than were stationed at Jerusalem, these had come from Caesarea with Pilate for the Passover festival. Mark refers to the garment put on Jesus as a purple cloak, which Matthew had called purple robe. The faded scarlet soldier's cloak was a mockery of real and very expensive purple that denoted royalty.

Dehumanizing a man about to be crucified no doubt made it easier to treat him so contemptibly.

The Rufus in v21 may well be the same man Paul greeted in Romans 16:13, particularly likely since Mark was probably written while Mark was with Peter in Rome, where Rufus.

Mark included the beginning of the crucifixion at about 9:00 a.m., the third hour (15:25).

The centurion responsible for the soldiers watching over the crucifixion saw the circumstances, the events that accompanied Jesus' death, but more than that he saw Jesus' own demeanor, heard his words, heard the weird accusations against the man, and concluded that Jesus was "the Son of God."

Mark names some of the women who looked on that day as Jesus suffered and died, but note "there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem." Since there were many women there, the names mentioned by the gospel writers may overlap, but also may differ and still be accurate.

We get a bit more perspective on Joseph in v43, his reputation and his expectation.

Pilate verified Jesus' death with a professional who knew what death looked like, the centurion who'd watched Jesus die.

The purchase of the linen shroud not only marks Joseph's respect for

Jesus, it was an expensive item, it also reminds us in retrospect that Jesus came as priest as well as king. A linen garment was appropriate for a priest in service.

## Luke 23

The priestly mob accused Jesus of subversive activities before Pilate, some of the accusations plainly false. The one that was somewhat true, that Jesus claimed to be Christ, a king, Pilate fixed on, though he probably didn't take it seriously. Pilate's verdict in v4 has been the conclusion of many examiners of Jesus over the centuries, but it's not enough to find no fault in him.

Only Luke includes the interval that day of Jesus being handed over to Herod, an attempted hand-off on Pilate's part. Herod's interest in Jesus had been mentioned before in 9:7ff and 13:31ff.

Herod quickly lost interest in Jesus silence, and gave himself over to mockery and abuse with his soldiers. Curiously, the problem of dealing with Jesus and the Jesus began a friendship between Pilate and Herod.

Pilate's verdict of "no fault" in Jesus is repeated in v14, backed with Herod's similar conclusion. Nevertheless, despite several protestations on Pilate's part, he agreed to kill Jesus. Finding "no fault" in Jesus is far from believing in him.

Luke 23:27 informs us that while one mob had demanded Jesus' death, another multitude was dismayed by the verdict. Jesus again warned of worse things ahead for Jerusalem because the city on the whole refused the tree of life in their midst.

V33 in KJV has the word Calvary for the place of crucifixion, a word borrowed from the Latin Vulgate. Luke, like Matthew and Mark, used the Greek word meaning skull.

Luke gives us another of the 7 sayings of Jesus on the cross in v34, the remarkable request that God forgive his enemies. As Jesus had commanded his disciples to do, Jesus did at the extreme.

Matthew briefly commented that the crucified criminals joined in the

mockery of Jesus, but Luke reports that one of them had the clarity to understand that he deserved what he was getting, but Jesus didn't, and Jesus was displaying a remarkable character in his suffering. He took a stand for Jesus and asked for Jesus to remember him "when you come into your kingdom." This is quite a remarkable statement of faith, suggesting that he was listening to the accusations, but also that perhaps he'd heard before what Jesus was teaching. In a 3<sup>rd</sup> recorded saying of Jesus, he promised this penitent man (who no doubt was a fellow Jew and heir of Abraham) "today you will be with me in paradise." Paradise is the garden of God, the word found in the Greek Old Testament in Genesis 2:8, 9, 10, 15, 16, etc. In the New Testament it is also found in 2 Corinthians 12:3 and Revelation 2:7. It is where the Tree of Life is and where humans walk with God.

The story of the "thief on the cross" does highlight repentance and confessing Jesus, but is not offered as an explanation of how to be saved through Jesus. Jesus forgave the sins of numerous Jews during his ministry, as in Luke 5:20, 7:47, and 19:9-10. The message of Mark 16:16 or Matthew 28:18-20 or Acts 2:38 had not yet been proclaimed, because Jesus had not yet died for our sins and the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out.

A 4<sup>th</sup> statement of Jesus from the cross is given in v46, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" Several months later as he was dying Stephen would similarly ask the Lord to forgive those who were killing him and say, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." (Acts 7:59). God did not "abandon" Jesus to Hades (Acts 2:25ff). He died with "no fault in him" to defeat death and break its bonds (Acts 2:24, Hebrews 2:14ff).

Writing to a different audience than Matthew or Mark, Luke records the Centurion's reaction but with a different quote (both true) in v47, and includes how disturbed the observant crowds were by what they saw (48). This helped set the stage for the proclamation of the resurrection just over 7 weeks later at Pentecost, Acts 2.

v49 indicates that the disciples in general did not approach the cross, but observed from a distance.

Luke notes that Joseph had not consented to the condemnation of Jesus, and affirms his upright character before God and man.

The mention of Joseph's prestige and wealth in the gospels connects us to the prophecy in Isaiah 53:9, crucified with robbers, buried in a rich man's tomb.

No matter what Joseph (and Nicodemus) did, the women who loved and followed Jesus intended to show him proper respect with honorable burial preparations after the mandatory interlude of the Sabbath.

### John 18-19

John's record of the arrest of Jesus highlights the personal presence, the power of Jesus' persona, even in the dark of night with a hostile mob in the garden. John also highlights the care of the Shepherd for his sheep that night, and includes the detail that the one with the sword was Simon Peter, as well as the name of the servant who was injured. Perhaps John knew his name because of some connection to the family of the high priest, if the disciple in v15-16 was John, or perhaps Malchus became a believer as a result of events that night and afterward.

Note the particular detail of the "charcoal fire" in 18:18, when Peter denied Jesus. That specific term will come up again in John 21.

The situation with Annas and Caiaphas is confusing, because it is unbiblical. The Romans controlled who wore the vestments of the high priest, but the people had their attitudes about who was really high priest. John indicates that Annas was pulling the strings with the arrest of Jesus, though Caiaphas was nominally the high priest. The attack on Jesus in v22 was certainly contrary to the Law, and Jesus made no apology for his objection to the abuse.

Notice again the details in v26, our author knew who participated in that conversation. And note that the place of Jesus' arrest is called a garden in 18:1 and 26. Jesus came to deal with sins that began in the garden of God. As the "last Adam" it was appropriate that the garden be the setting of his arrest.

John reports details of interactions with Pilate not included by the other gospel writers. The irony of v30, "trust us" they said, was apparent even to Pilate. Jesus previously recorded words are cited in v32 just like the words

of Old Testament prophets.

John records the infamous exchange between Jesus and Pilate that climaxed with Pilate's cynical "what is truth?" in v38. Some very important doctrinal principles are rehearsed in 18:36-37.

The public display of a bloody and brutalized Jesus wearing the crown of thorns and mockery of a purple robe may have been intended to elicit compassion (19:1ff), "Behold the man!"

The substance of the accusations against Jesus in 19:7 had nothing to do with Roman law. Nevertheless, Pilate knew enough about Judaism as several years as governor to be alarmed by the statement.

Who had the "greater sin" in v11? Surely the "high priest" who knew the scriptures and knew the signs Jesus had done, and refused to acknowledge him. Choosing to defy God.

The assertion in 19:15, "we have no king but Caesar" must be seen as blasphemous, an ironic truth that they had rejected God as king.

John doesn't mention Simon carrying the cross of Jesus. It is surmised that Jesus, having been brutalized repeatedly, was not able to carry the cross all the way to the place of crucifixion and that Simon was drafted from the crowd to finish the course.

John directly reminds us of another fulfilled prophecy in 19:24. He again reminds us of Psalm 69:21, which he suggests Jesus fulfilled on purpose in v28. John also connects us back to Passover in Exodus 12:22 with the detail of the hyssop branch in v29.

Here in John 19 we have 3 more of the 7 recorded statements of Jesus on the cross. 1) v26-27, when Jesus provided for his mother. Note the connection back to John 2:4 when Jesus had said to Mary, "Woman... my hour has not yet come." Now the hour had come. 2) v28, "I thirst." the very human reality of Jesus' suffering. And 3) "It is finished," when he "gave up his spirit" having done all that the Father sent him to do.

John highlights too the even stronger than usual desire to hasten the deaths of the crucified, by breaking their legs, preventing them being able

to rise up and reduce the constriction of their lungs and hearts. Jesus though was already dead, and John records also the piercing of his side with additional references to prophecies fulfilled. The Sabbath was a high day, because it was Passover week with the Feast of Unleavened Bread in progress, and the presentation of the sheaf of first fruits was imminent on the first day of the week.

The extravagance of burial costs borne by Joseph and Nicodemus is highlighted in v39-40. Just as John emphasized the garden setting for Jesus' arrest, he also mentioned the garden setting for the crucifixion and burial in 19:41. Again, we're reminded of the garden of God, Eden, where God walked with humans.

## Matthew 28

The gospels leave no doubt when Jesus rose from the dead, it was on the first day of the week. After the Sabbath and in the proximity of dawn.

Jesus needed no help from angels in his resurrection, but even so angels showed up, in numbers, reminiscent of their activities when Jesus was born. Angels rolled away the stone and interacted with the disciples who came to the tomb, women and men. They hadn't understood exactly how God was going to redeem humanity and renew creation (1 Peter 1:12, for example). They celebrated Jesus' resurrection as they had celebrated his birth as they saw what God had done.

We don't know just how many women went to the tomb as morning dawned on that first day of the week, Matthew names 2, Mark names 3, but remember too Mark 15:41. Luke references the "women who had come with him from Galilee" in Luke 23:54-24:1, names 3 in Luke 24:10 and indicates there were others. The gospel weren't attempting to give an account of exactly who or how many angels or women or male disciples came to the tomb that day. Several of each, apparently. And remember that Mary (Miriam) was an exceedingly common name among 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews.

"An angel of the Lord" dramatically opened the tomb. Since he was there for the Lord, we can understand the Lord wanted the tomb open so that witnesses could see Jesus had exited the tomb, leaving the burial clothes behind. Clearly the guards witnessed the supernatural power of the angel, but even so they chose a bribe over the truth. Some think that

miracles would persuade anyone to believe, but in fact miracles are rarely persuasive to the many who really don't want to believe and obey the Lord.

Jesus had previously stated that after his death, burial and resurrection he would meet the disciples in Galilee, and the angel told the women that plan was in the works. It would actually be more than a week before the disciples went to Galilee for that rendezvous, as described in John, but as noted in v16 they did go.

The combination of fear and joy in v8 would be part of the confusion as Jesus' words were fulfilled in literal ways that none of the disciples had ever imagined. Despair and grief displaced by uncertainty and thrilling expectation.

The women had virtually no standing in either Roman or Jewish custom as witnesses, nevertheless they were the first witnesses of the resurrection and carried the word to the male disciples.

The comings and goings that morning are summarized by all 4 gospel writers, and it's not possible to build an exact moment by moment sequence of encounters. None of the writers attempted to do that. There were several encounters with Jesus in those early hours near the tomb, as well as others later in the day. Some involved the women, some the men, some one person, some several people. When Jesus met with the women in v9 they fell at his feet, grasped him, and worshiped him. All perfectly appropriate. Jesus is worthy of worship. Jesus affirmed the message the angel had given.

Meanwhile, the guards did not seek truthful explanations of what they had seen, but went back to their employers, the enemies of Jesus who had demanded his death, and the Jewish clergymen made up an explanation. Again, signs and wonders would not dissuade them, neither the guards nor the religious professionals. The myth of the grave robbers is demonstrably false from the get go (drowsy guards couldn't possibly sleep through the rolling back of the stone, nor could sleeping guards know what happened while they slept), but the story circulated as intended in the early days of the church, and made its way into the Jewish Talmud several generations later.

The notion that the terrified and demoralized apostles concocted lies

about Jesus' resurrection and then every single one of them remained loyal to lies they'd made up as they faced torture and persecution unto death in the following decades defies credulity.

When the disciples did make their way to Galilee more than a week later they met with Jesus as he had pre-arranged. The "they" of v17 no doubt includes more than the 11 specifically mentioned in v16, as we can be sure the two named in Acts 1 as potential apostles must have been there, and its reasonable to guess that this group included the 500 hundred Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:6.

Note the claims and instructions in v18-20. Jesus claimed to have "all authority in heaven and on earth." He reigns as king, with authority beyond what the devil could offer in Matthew 4:8-10. Disciples are to make disciples, and those who become disciples are to be baptized as described, affirming the triune being that God is. All nations are the potential members of Jesus' kingdom. Obedience to what Jesus taught (ie, what Matthew wrote) is called for in Jesus' kingdom. Jesus is present with his disciples until the end. This "great commission" had no time stamp for expiration or completion, and no geographical or cultural boundary. The message still must pass from disciples to new disciples.

## Mark 16

"When the Sabbath was past" probably means Saturday night, as we view the calendar, that the women mentioned, and perhaps others, bought appropriate burial spices to use the next morning, early on the first day of the week.

Mark, in v1-8 focuses on the uncertainty and confusion of events that morning even more than Matthew. Perhaps the "young man" the women observed is the same angel mentioned in Matthew, and his perch on the stone was on the right at the entrance, or perhaps they interacted with 2 angels in those moments at the tomb. Note the consternation described in v8.

v9-20 provides a synopsis of a few encounters with Jesus that first day of the week, some of which are also described with somewhat more details by Luke.

Note the initial reaction to the women's testimony in v11, and similar doubt on the part of some later in the day. Remember that "those who had been with him" and "the rest" embraces the 11 and others who'd been in the company.

v14 may be an appearance recorded by Luke and perhaps one also alluded to by John, on that 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week, the 3<sup>rd</sup> day after his suffering, as he'd predicted, Sunday, resurrection day.

Jesus chided the 11 for their reluctance to believe his word and his witnesses.

v15-18 may be a summary like Matthew 28:18-20 of things Jesus told his disciples, and he may have told the 11 and others the same or similar things several times over the course of his 40 days of appearances. There are common themes of going everywhere, making believers, and baptizing them for salvation. The teaching in Mark also includes mention of works of the Holy Spirit, including miraculous preservation of life in some instances. We have examples disciples doing most of these signs in the book of Acts. None of these signs were an end in themselves, no disciple ever intentionally handled poisonous snakes or drank poison. That would be what Jesus condemned, as did Moses, putting the Lord to the test.

Mark supplies no time frame, but concludes with Jesus ascension to the Father's right hand, and the assertion that the signs had been done by the Lord as his disciples preached the gospel. v20 is very similar to Hebrews 2:3-4.

## Luke 24

Luke's account of Resurrection Day includes more detailed eye witness encounters than Matthew or Mark. This may be in part because Luke interviewed numerous witnesses and consulted written sources to compile his gospel, and because Luke was making a case for a recipient to see that "you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:1-4).

Luke tells us the Sabbath was over (23:56), and in the early morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week (24:1) the women who'd followed Jesus from Galilee (23:55) went to the tomb and found the stone rolled away and the

tomb empty.

Luke's account of dazzling angels at the tomb announcing the resurrection might remind us of angels in glorious splendor announcing Jesus' birth in Luke 2:9ff. The words of the angels in Luke 24:5 might remind us of the words of 12 year old Jesus in Luke 2:49.

Note that the women had been present ("he told you"... "they remembered his words") when Jesus forewarned his disciples of his suffering, death, and resurrection (Luke 24:6, 9:21-22, 43-44).

Note again in 24:10, Luke names 3 women and says there were others in the party.

The apostles gave little weight to the testimony of the women... but Peter went to look, and was impressed but uncertain of what it meant. From John's account we know that John also went to the tomb at the same time. Luke may have chosen to focus on Peter, the major human character in Acts 1-12, or he may not have personally interviewed John to get his testimony while writing the gospel. Note that v24 recalled "some of ... us" went to the tomb.

Note that the encounter in route to and at Emmaus (24:13-32) was "that very day." Still the first day of the week (v1) and explicitly also "the 3<sup>rd</sup> day since these things happened" (v21).

Note the emphasis on being in harmony with the scriptures in v25, 27, 32, 44-45.

It may be that Jesus chose to veil himself in their eyes because of their doubts and "slow" hearts (v25). Even so, his explanation of the scriptures resonated within them (32) and they could not miss the way he took bread, blessed it and broke it as he had done so many times with his disciples. The mannerisms and words were indisputable testimony.

v18, what had happened was the talk of the town.

Again, the gathering of the 11 (v33) included others. By this time he'd been seen by Simon Peter, who had previously seen the empty tomb with the grave cloths abandoned there. The discussion may have gone on for

some time that evening, but it was interrupted by the appearance of Jesus himself in their presence. Jesus and the evangelist wanted us to know this was not a disembodied spirit or a vision, but the real body of Jesus alive again.

Some attempt to draw conclusions about the future resurrection body from the appearances of Jesus to his disciples, but several matters should be considered. Jesus plainly affirmed that he stood before them clothed in the same body that had been crucified, wounds and all, and that he was “flesh and bone,” not “spirit” (24:39). Paul on the other hand affirmed that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50) and that we shall all be changed from perishable and mortal to imperishable and immortal (1 Corinthians 15:-55). He also taught that we don’t know yet what that immortal glorified body will be like (1 Corinthians 15:35-44) and that the man of dust is transformed into the man of heaven (46-49). John, who was present when Jesus appeared that evening of the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week and other times in the succeeding 40 days indicated that “what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). So, John, who had seen the resurrected Lord did not purport to know what the glorified resurrection body would be like. He had seen Jesus as he was, not “as he is.” Jesus had been momentarily transfigured on the mountain with Moses and Elijah, but now he has ascended into glory in God’s presence (Mark 16:19, 1 Timothy 3:16, John 17:5, Acts 3:13). The resurrection is bodily, but the resurrected body, will be transformed into a more glorious body. Jesus rose bodily, and ascended in divine glory. The fact that Jesus could “vanish from their sight” or stand among them in a closed room speaks of his power, not the nature of the resurrection body. Likewise, the fact he could eat and drink with them says nothing about the nature or needs of the immortal body. It affirms his body was truly raised from the dead and he was himself.

Jesus’ reference to the scriptures in v44 is to the whole of the Hebrew Bible, the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, in the typical Hebrew 3 fold division of the books/scrolls.

Jesus’ words in v46-47, like Matthew and Mark, alludes to the great commission to carry the gospel everywhere to everyone. The “and he said to them” in v46 leads into a summary of things he taught them over the 40 days of his appearances, including the instruction in v49 to wait in

Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come upon them in power, as reiterated in Acts 1. They did not spend the 40 days in Jerusalem, but did make a trip to Galilee and then returned to Jerusalem for their final instructions. God had chosen Jerusalem as the place from which the gospel would go forth to the world.

The ascension was from the Mt of Olives, as reported in Acts 1. Bethany was over the crest, on the east slope of the Mt.

Note that they worshiped him, v52.

John 20-21

John mentions only Mary Magdalene in the first approach to the tomb in the early morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week. She was the spokesperson for the group.

The disciples may not have all been in the same place that Sunday morning, but Mary found Peter and John (the author, “the disciple Jesus’ loved”) and told them. John outran Peter. A minor detail of eye witness recollection. The personalities of the 2 men are reflected along with their speed, as John pauses and Peter goes right in.

Some have tried to make much of the appearance of the grave cloths, but John’s description doesn’t support conclusions about their appearance, whether they were unwrapped from the risen Jesus or whether his body passed through them and left them in place. The description of the head covering is mostly nondescript, whether intentionally folded or wrapped or as some would have it shaped like the head they had covered. Such details are just not in the simple Greek terms John used to describe the scene. We can conclude no one carried off the body, because no one would have unwrapped the body before carrying it off. Yet the body was gone, and the cloths were still there, left behind on the burial bench (recall the description of Lazarus’ resuscitation in John 11:44). The words suggest the face cloth was separate from the body wrappings. Incidentally, these descriptive terms do not suggest a piece of cloth like the “shroud of Turin.”

20:10 is sadly anticlimactic. They returned to the places they were staying in Jerusalem.

Mary's encounter with angels and then with Jesus may be the same one mentioned in Matthew 28:9. The chronology isn't clear, and listing a sequential chronology wasn't the point for either Matthew or John. In Matthew the women clasped Jesus' feet and worshiped him, in John Mary is told "do not cling to me." The description in John does not suggest they didn't touch him, but as he had previously told the disciples in chapters 13-17, he was going away to the Father, and would not continue among them. His bodily presence was purposeful and necessary for a time, but not the enduring plan. The ascending in 20:17 is surely the ascension elsewhere referred to after 40 days.

"Supposing him to be the gardener" (20:15) is humble almost to the point of humor, yet very appropriate as the tomb was in a garden, and the return to Eden (Paradise) is very much an implied connection. The first gardener was Adam, and Jesus is the last Adam. He called her by name, reminding us of incidents from the call of Nathanael to the good shepherd message in John.

John, like the other evangelists, made it clear that resurrection day was the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week (20:1, 19) and that Jesus made multiple appearances to his scattered disciples that day. First the women in the garden near the tomb, then others.

John highlights the fear of the disciples even with the stories of the empty tomb and resurrection appearances, but locked doors were no obstacle to the Lord.

The apparent giving of the Holy Spirit in 20:22 was necessary for them to understand the scriptures (recall Luke 24:45) and prepare for the impending outpouring at Pentecost (as in Acts 1:12ff), but this was not yet the baptism of the Holy Spirit and power from on high that had been promised. They were being commissioned afresh for the work that lay ahead, but the promised outpouring was still ahead.

Thomas missed the appearance of Jesus that first Sunday evening (20:24), and wasn't pleased with the story related by the other disciples. He claimed to be from Missouri! A week later (the 8<sup>th</sup> day in v26 would be the following Sunday) once again the disciples were together behind locked doors, and once again the Lord appeared. Thomas had not been the only doubter among them, recall Luke 24:38ff, and the Lord willingly assured

Thomas, with the same sort of chiding the apostles had often received for their uncertainties and confusion. Note Thomas acclamation in v28, which Jesus accepted as entirely appropriate.

Those disciples saw Jesus so that they might bring the message of faith to us who have not seen him without own eyes (20:29).

As noted in 20:30-31, neither John nor all of the Bible gives more than a sufficient glimpse into who Jesus is and what he has done. We have enough to come to him in faith, but a very incomplete account.

The events in John 21 were in the Galilee. The other gospels mention Jesus telling the disciples to go to Galilee, and they did. While there, in the area of Capernaum, Peter and 6 others went fishing. Perhaps for old times' sake, perhaps being at loose ends for a bit, perhaps wondering what to do next. Jesus seized on the moment in the familiar setting as the opportunity to really clear the air with Peter.

One of the 7 disciples on the boat was the beloved disciple who wrote the gospel (21:7). Of those listed, only one of the sons of Zebedee makes sense, and James is essentially excluded by the timing of his death in Acts 12. Along with ancient testimony, John 21 helps us identify the author of the gospel.

The catch of fish at Jesus' direction was certainly a reminder of previous experiences with the Lord.

Confusion about the Lord's appearance on the shore may have been related to the lighting, day was just breaking, or Jesus' face may have been shadowed by his garments, or he may have been testing them as with the two disciples walking to Emmaus in Luke 24.

The charcoal fire in v9 is described with the same word as was used for the fire where Peter warmed himself in John 18:18, when he denied Jesus. These are the only times the Greek word is found in the New Testament. John's language suggests Jesus intentionally set the stage for his meeting with Peter.

Reporting this as the 3<sup>rd</sup> appearance of Jesus in 21:14 is somewhat like John mentioning 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> miraculous signs in the first few chapters. Not

that there weren't other miracles, but that he selected particular miracles to highlight and make his case.

Jesus called Peter Simon son of Jonah in John 1:42, and again in John 21:15-19. (That name actually also anticipated Peter's future call to go to the Gentiles from Joppa, Acts 10, the port from which the prophet Jonah had attempted to run away from going to Gentiles, Jonah 1.)

There are 2 Greek words for "love" in v15-17, "phileo" and "agape". The two have different shades of meaning, but they are used as synonyms and probably don't reflect any particular hesitancy on Peter's part. "Phileo" is used of God's love in John 5:20, 16:27, and of Jesus' love for Lazarus and John in 11:3, 20:2. Peter was challenged and he affirmed his love for the Lord 3 times, as he had previously denied the Lord 3 times, in the dark by a charcoal fire. Reflecting back on his own role as the Good Shepherd in John 10, Jesus repeatedly commanded Peter to care for his sheep, putting Jesus and the sheep of his pasture ahead of himself. Jesus indicated Peter's future imprisonment and martyrdom in the service of the master.

John 21:20-24 seems to have 2 messages. One is to see to ourselves in the service of God, to mind our own business as it were and leave the Lord's business to the Lord. The other is to lay to rest rumors that John, as perhaps the last surviving apostle when his gospel was composed, wouldn't die before the Lord came, or perhaps would enjoy miraculous translation into glory. John didn't want anyone's faith to be derailed by misconstruing what Jesus said.

In 21:24-25 as in 20:30-31 we are reminded that we have faithful and sufficient eye witness testimony about Jesus, but only a tiny subset of all that he said and did. We have enough to believe and enough to follow.