

JESUS THE MESSIAH

A Fresh View of His Life and Ministry

Edited by

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DEDICATION

The book is dedicated to all who recognize Jesus as the Messiah, Lord and personal Savior and who seek to bring others, under their influence, to a saving knowledge of Him, the desire of all nations.

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FOREWORD

The life and teachings of Christ provide an inexhaustible reservoir of sanctified knowledge from which humanity can draw. Scholars, historians and philosophers from the very earliest times have written tomes of biographies and commentaries about this peerless personality. Yet only but a few nuggets of precious truth about Christ have been dredged to the surface. There is still much more to explore and appropriate from his life. John, the beloved disciple, writing under the inspiration of God, concluded his Gospel by saying that “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” (John 21:24, NIV). Indeed so many books have been written about the life of Christ and yet the world is not filled with them! This demonstrates that an additional book about the life and teachings of Christ is not only relevant but rather a praiseworthy effort to raise the level of consciousness and awaken our lethargic spirits to begin to recognize and appreciate Jesus our Messiah for bringing salvation to our doorsteps. By his life and teachings Jesus opened a new vista as well as created a platform for understanding God for whom he is and that seeing Jesus we have seen God (John 14:9). Just as his life was remarkable and unique in perfect obedience to his Father's will, his teachings are life-giving; they introduced a new freshness to the dry and insipid disputations of the religious leaders of his day.

It is therefore commendable that some scholars and teachers of religion in Babcock University, with

considerable life experiences within and outside the academia, have written the book *Jesus the Messiah: A Fresh View of His Life and Teachings* as a way of creating renewed interest in Christ as our Savior. The book explores the life and teachings of the One who said, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63, KJV). Undoubtedly, the book is worth the effort. While scorning unwarranted display of vaunted scholarship it exhibits the earmarks of reasoned discourse and deep spirituality. I encourage all who desire to have an encounter with Jesus and a rich spiritual experience to pore over its content.

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January, 2015.

PREFACE

The book, *Jesus the Messiah: A fresh View of His Life and Teachings* is making its debut at a time when religious ideas are either ignored or recited like a mantra to meet immediate needs. Some seem to have imbibed the idea in the Western world that Jesus as an historical figure has little or no relevance to people who live in our time. To them Jesus is just a relic and nothing more. In Africa, however, there is a heightened interest in Christianity and a flurry of ideas about the life and teachings of Jesus. Sometimes the true Jesus is hidden under a morass of these ideas and his teachings are distorted.

It is here the book becomes particularly relevant to all who have the slightest interest in Christianity. It does not only unveil Jesus as the expected Messiah but clearly articulated the life he lived, culminating in his death, resurrection and ascension to heaven.

Written by scholars with varied experiences, the book is intended to present Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior of the world. It is not just a biographical or even historical account of Jesus but it is theological as well. Much of what Jesus said and did have theological and practical dimensions. They were not to be read just for the sake of satisfying our curiosity. His teachings were designed to connect us to God.

The book, *Jesus the Messiah: A fresh View of His Life and Teachings* has twelve chapters, each chapter intricately wedded to one another. Chapters one to six dwell on events connected with the birth, childhood and youthful period of Christ as well as set the stage for the commencement of his public ministry. Chapters seven to

nine focus on the life of Christ as the Messiah and his teachings as a Rabbi with a divine mission. The last few chapters - chapters ten to twelve - relay the events that mark the close of his earthly ministry. This encompasses his arrest, trial, crucifixion, death and resurrection. Christ's ascension to heaven became a promise and a guarantee that he will come back to literally deliver those who trust in him from the throes of death.

The book deals with a subject that should be of utmost interest to us all. Originally, intended as a resource tool for teaching the undergraduate general education course in religion the book definitely lends itself to a wider application. Students, teachers and religious people of varied persuasions will benefit immensely from going through its pages. In fact, the book is meant to redirect our minds to Jesus, the only hope of salvation. Ignoring the Messiah or misunderstanding his mission is perilous. The reader can be sure-footed about the most important thing in life; and that is, to know God and the Christ He sent to redeem us.

The Editors:

January, 2015

CHAPTER ONE

THE WORLD WHICH JESUS MET AND WORKED IN

Sunday D. Audu

The Inter-testamental Period between Malachi and Matthew

In Biblical history, there was a gap of about 400 years between the Old and New Testaments known as the Inter-testamental Period (between 433-5BC).¹ Although this period is sometimes called the "silent" years, the years were not that silent. Two things in general are significant about those years. First, they were the "silent years" in that there were no prophets and there is nothing recorded in the Bible concerning the activities of this period. Secondly, there were many developments and changes in the political, religious, and social atmosphere of Palestine. This does not mean, according to Surburg,² that there were no events of historical importance that took place within those years. Studying and understanding this period throws more light in better understanding the world just before the time of Jesus Christ.

Historically, the Inter-testamental period can be separated into six periods namely; Grecian, Ptolemaic, Syrian, Maccabean, Hasmonean and Roman periods. By

the time Christ was born, all the other periods had passed and the world was under the Roman period. Meanwhile, Jewish forces began to fight among themselves in a bitter power struggle between various Zealots and aristocratic leaders, thus weakening their ability to fend off the Romans as they advanced into Judea. In A.D. 70 the Romans captured Jerusalem and destroyed the temple.

Palestine at the Time of Jesus

The entire Roman Empire was made up of about fifty provinces and Palestine was one of them. Governors were appointed by the Emperor in Rome to administer the provinces. Pontius Pilate was appointed to oversee Palestine in AD 26-36 because of the political unrest in the province. It was under him that Christ was executed.

Palestine itself was divided into different administrative units at different times under Roman rule and governed by various levels of the Roman political bureaucracy.³ In most cases, appointments into political leadership positions were granted or withdrawn as a reward for being in or out of favor with Caesar. This may explain why Pontius Pilate was afraid the Jews may report him to Caesar for setting Jesus free during His trial.

The Herods as Rulers

In the New Testament, those who ruled as kings in Palestine were generally referred to as Herod. There were several of them. Bratcher⁴ outlines their various activities and lists the following as they relate to the life of Jesus.

1. **Herod the Great.** He ruled the whole of Palestine between 37 BC-4 BC. He was a non-Jew but an

Edomite. The Edomites were traditionally bitter enemies of the Jews. Herod the Great was a ruthless ruler who murdered many people, including even members of his own family. During his reign, a sect of the Jews known as the Zealots was against the gentile Roman rule.⁵ They caused riots and tried to topple the government. Herod executed many of them by hanging on a special Roman instrument called the Cross. It was the same Herod recorded in Matthew chapter 2 who ordered the death of all the baby boys in Bethlehem after the visit of the wise men from the East who came in search of Jesus. He died shortly thereafter (Matt. 2:19). His death made the family of Jesus who had fled to Egypt to return to Galilee. After his death Rome divided almost all of Palestine among his three sons Archelaus, Philip, and Antipas.

2. **Herod Archelaus.** He reigned between BC 4- AD 6 in the southern parts of Palestine. It was during his reign that the family of Jesus returned from hiding in Egypt. He was known for the harsh treatment of the people. Because of continuing complaints, he was removed by Caesar and banished.
3. **Herod Philip.** He reigned between BC 4-AD 34 in the Northeast area of Palestine and did not play an notable role in the New Testament events.
4. **Herod Antipas.** He reigned between BC 4- AD 39 in the Northern parts. He participated most in the events recorded in the Gospels since he controlled

Galilee and Perea during the lifetime of Jesus. He was the one who imprisoned and killed John the Baptist. He participated in the judgment of Christ whom he expected to perform miracles as proof of His power so he can set Him free. After cross-examining and mocking Jesus, he sent Him back to Pilate before the crucifixion (Luke 23:8-12). Hoehner⁶ portrays Antipas as a self-indulgent and ambitious ruler. He eventually fell out of favor with Rome and was banished.

Jesus was born and raised in the land of Palestine. That was also where He ministered throughout His life on earth. The Hebrew word *Pelesheth* is translated three times in the King James Version Bible as *Palestina* (Exodus 15:14, Isaiah 14:29, 31) and once as Palestine (Joel 3:4). Dever,⁷ and Bratcher⁸ explained that originally, Palestine was used to refer to the seacoast of the land of Canaan inhabited by the Philistines and that when the area became a Roman province in 68 B.C., it was officially designated Palestine. For ease of administration, the province was organized into seven political regions namely:

1. Galilee, (in the north).
2. Perea (was also in the north).
3. Decapolis (Northeast).
4. Syria (Northeast).
5. Samaria (in the south).
6. Idumea (in the south also).
7. Judea (in the southern portion of the country).

Most of these regions were part of where Jesus worked and they were mentioned in the gospels. The most prominent among them are the following:

Galilee: Although Jesus was born at Bethlehem in Judea, he grew up and lived in the town of Nazareth in Galilee. This northern territory of Palestine was also his most important area of activity. Galilee was a rural area, and agriculture was the main occupation. The Lake of Gennesaret in Galilee was famous for its fishing. No wonder Jesus found his first disciples among fishermen (Mark 1:16-29).

The Decapolis: In the time of Jesus, Galilee His hometown was surrounded by a number of Greek cities. The most prominent was the group of ten Greek towns known as the Decapolis.

Samaria: This area was south of Galilee. The Samaritans were a mixed population resulting from political transfers of population of non-Jews whom the Jews did not consider to be real Jews. As a result, their relationship was not cordial.

Judea: This was the region where Jesus was born when His parents came to Nazareth for the census. The name Judea is used in two different senses. Its chief city was Jerusalem which was the capital of the Jewish nation. It was also where the temple was and it attracted Jews from all over the world yearly where they went for various religious festivals.

The Religious and Cultural Lives of the Jews

At the time of Jesus Christ, most of the Jews were bilingual, that is, they spoke their own language (Hebrew) as well as Greek which was the official language. In addition to these two, most of them spoke Aramaic. Jesus spoke Aramaic.

Among the Jews, their major religious practice was Judaism. It was the religion that Jesus was born into and which He practiced throughout His life. Hanson and Oakman⁹ explained that at that period, there were many different groups among the adherents of the Judaism. Saldarini¹⁰ adds that in their belief system, there were core teachings that unified them but at some point, there were other beliefs and practices they debated and disagreed among themselves. This was also corroborated by Russell¹¹ and Sandmel.¹² The following are the groups that comprised the population of the Jews and how they carried out their religious practices and belief systems. According to Neusner,¹³ these groups played prominent roles in the lives of the people of their day.

The Pharisees

The Pharisees were among the influential group of people who wielded considerable power at the time of Christ.¹⁴ The Pharisees adhered to strict observance of the Law of Moses, purity rituals, tithing, and food restrictions based on the Hebrew Scriptures and on later traditions. They tried as much as possible to live morally pure lives and had a great zeal for their religion. Most of the Pharisees were wealthy, powerful, and influential and the

mass of the people were afraid of them and considered them the most accurate interpreters of the law (John 9:20-23; 11:45-50; 12:42-43). They also had powerful connections with people in high places. This is exemplified by their access to Pontius Pilate during the crucifixion of Jesus and the ministry of Paul (Matthew 27:62; Acts 23:6-8).

The Sadducees

These were also very prominent members of the Jewish community in Palestine at the time of Christ. They were not as numerous as the Pharisees but were more elitist and influential, with better connections. They followed the laws of the Hebrew Bible (the Torah), but rejected newer traditions.

The word "Sadducees" comes from the Hebrew *tsaddiqim* ("righteous ones"). Because many of the Sadducees belonged to the priestly class, the name might have derived from Zadok, the high priest under King David (1 Kings 1:26). Their relationship with the Pharisees was not always cordial due to some variation in their beliefs and competition for influence among the people. For political connections with the Romans, the Sadducees were not in good terms with other segments of the Jewish society. They constituted a large percentage of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1; 5:17; 23:6). There were many beliefs the Sadducees had that were at variance with the Pharisees. They did not believe in life after death (Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27) or in angels or spirits (Acts 23:8). The New Testament portrays them (most often

together with the Pharisees) as opponents of Jesus (Matt 16:1-12; Mark 18:12-27).

The Priests

This group was constituted by members of the tribe of Levi who were responsible for the temple and its sacrifices, and thus were the religious and social leaders of the Jewish people. In the history of ancient Israel, Priests and Levites had to be men from the tribe of Levi. The remaining Jews from the eleven other tribes could not be priests. The name "Priests" is used generically in the New Testament, but there were sub-groups among them that carried out specific roles and responsibilities. The following were some of the categories:

- a. **The Levites:** The Levites (members of the tribe of Levi who were not priests) assisted in the practical operation of the temple as guards, musicians, etc. (Luke 10:32; John 1:19; Acts 4:36; cf. Num 3, 8; etc.).
- b. **The Priests:** The Priests offered the sacrifices and took care of other cultic/ritual concerns in the temple (Mark 1:44; Matt 12:4-5; Luke 1:5-23). They were in charge of the Temple in Jerusalem and thus were the most important religious leaders in ancient Israel, at least prior to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 by the armies of Rome.
- c. **The High Priest:** The High Priest was selected and appointed annually from among the serving priests. However, members of the family of Annas and Caiaphas were often re-appointed at the time of

Christ in the first century (Matt 26:3, 57; Luke 3:2; John 11:49; 18:12-28; Acts 4:6).

In general, the Gospels portray the chief priests (often with the scribes and elders) as members of the ruling authorities who opposed Jesus and planned repeatedly to arrest and kill him. They paid Judas to betray Him and were in the forefront when they eventually condemned him to death.

The Scribes

The Scribes did not form a distinct group of their own, but could belong to other groups (for example, "the scribes of the Pharisees" in Mark 2:16; Acts 23:9). They were specially trained in writings and thus influential as record keepers, interpreters and teachers of the Law. They also served as agents of the rulers. Feinberg¹⁵ explained that prominent among the duties of the Scribes involved producing legal documents, recording deeds, copying scriptures, teaching people, and many other related matters. Since they specialized in the interpretation of the Jewish Law (Torah), the "scribes" are sometimes translated and regarded as "lawyers". In the gospels however, only Luke used the technical term for "lawyer" (*nomikos*; 7:30; 10:25;). In some other passages Mark and Matthew used *grammateus* for "scribes".

Like the other Jewish groups, the gospels portrayed the scribes along with the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees as opponents of Jesus who actively sought his death (Mark 11:27). The book of Acts of the Apostles also

portrays them as opponents who worked hard to stop the progress of the work of the early Christians (Acts 4:5; 6:12). There were however, a few exceptions with situations where some scribes are neutral (Matt 13:52). Some were even praised by Jesus (Mark 12:28-34), and others defended Paul during his ministry when he came under attack by other Jews (Acts 23:9).

The Essenes

The Essenes are a smaller group or "sect" that lived a communal lifestyle at Qumram near the Dead Sea. They had strict membership requirements, rules, and rituals. It may seem John the Baptist and even Jesus was closely associated with the Essenes even though a direct connection is unlikely. The following are distinctive characteristics of the Essenes:

1. They regarded the Jerusalem priests as illegitimate, since those were not Zadokites (from the family of the high priest Zadok).
2. They rejected the validity of the Temple worship and the importance of the Jerusalem Temple. As a result they refused to attend the major religious festivals of the Feast of Tabernacles, Passover, and Pentecost.
3. They expected God to send a great prophet and two different "Messiahs" (anointed leaders), one kingly and one priestly.
4. They preserved many documents (scrolls) in their monastery that supply valuable information. These include complete scrolls and thousands of written

fragments were discovered from 1946 to mid-1950's in caves near Qumran. The Scrolls contain copies of almost the entire Hebrew Bible, some older non-canonical texts, and dozens of the Essenes' own writings.

Herodians

This was a faction that supported the policies and government of the Herodian family, especially during the time of Herod Antipas, ruler over Galilee and Perea during the lifetimes of John the Baptist and of Jesus. In the gospels, the group was mentioned only twice in Mark and once in Matthew, but never in Luke, John, or the rest of the NT.

1. According to accounts in Mark 3:6; they conspired with the Pharisees to kill Jesus, still fairly early during Jesus' ministry in Galilee.
2. In Mark 12:13-17 and Matt 22:16 they joined some Pharisees in trying to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes to Caesar.
3. The following texts also contain possible related references to the Herodians who were friends and court officials of Herod (Mark 6:21, 26; Matt 14:1-12; Luke 23:7-12).

The Zealots

Jewish nationalistic pride made certain segments of the society to be strongly opposed to Roman rule. At the period, there were pockets of revolutionary groups that sought the downfall of the Romans. One of the several different "revolutionary" groups was the Zealots. They

were probably not an organized group at first. They were simply a group of any strongly opinionated individual Jews who were "zealous" for God's law (Num 25:13; 1 Kings 19:10; Acts 22:3; Gal 1:14). One of the disciples of Jesus is called "Simon the Zealot" in Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13 (also called "Simon the Cananaean" in Mark 3:18 & Matt 10:4). He might have belonged to a revolutionary group before joining Jesus, but more likely was "zealous" in the older sense.

The Gospel Records

The Gospels are the books that give the story of the life of Christ. The word "gospel" is a translation of the Greek word "*euangelion*" which means "*good news*." When used in other parts of the New Testament, *euangelion* also generally means:

1. Good message
2. The subject of preaching
3. Joyful report of Salvation through Jesus
4. Revelation from God.

In the early church, there were several written works in circulation that were claimed to be the gospels. Each was believed to be accurate by various groups at that time. However, four of them; *Mark*, *Matthew*, *Luke* and *John* were later accepted by the early Christian movement as inspired by God and were approved for inclusion in the official canon and are found today in every Bible Bruce.¹⁶ This process of approval is known as canonization.¹⁷

The Canonization of the New Testament

Canon is a Greek word meaning “standard” or “measurement.” Within the context of religion, it means a collection of books recognized as authoritative Scripture. Canonization of the New Testament therefore, involves the various processes through which many books were collected and recognized as authoritative Scripture.¹⁸ It was at the Council of Carthage (AD 397) that the canonization of the New Testament was concluded.

The New Testament canon is made up of 27 books divided thus:

- I. 4 Gospels
- ii. 21 Epistles (letters) written by Paul, Peter, James, John and others
- iii. 1 Historical book (Acts of the Apostles).
- iv. 1 Apocalyptic book (prophecy concerning the end of the world, Revelation).

The gospels were written by many authors but each wrote to present one point, that is, salvation through Jesus Christ.¹⁹ None was a repetition of the other. The aim of the gospels was to prove that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and that by believing in Him, one has eternal life. The Gospels tell five things about Jesus Christ: 1. His incarnation, 2. His ministry, 3. His death, 4. His resurrection and, 5. His Second Coming. The Gospels can be categorized or be generally divided into two namely:

1. **The Synoptic Gospels:** These consist of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The term *synoptic* is derived from the Greek words “*sun*” which means *with* or *together*

and “*optanomai*” which means *to see*. Put together, the word *synoptic* means *to see together* or *to have common view*. The Gospel of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are synoptic because the authors presented their accounts of the life of Christ in a similar manner. That notwithstanding, there are still problems with the ways some of the stories and events in the gospels were presented. The similarities and differences among the first three gospels have given rise to much speculation. This has given rise to what is known as the *Synoptic Problem*. For example, there are passages among the three gospels that are identical or almost exact like **Matthew 8:1-4**, **Mark 1:40-44** and **Luke 5:12-14**. Theologians have concluded that the gospels are linked in some way; most believe that the author of one gospel copied passages from another.

2. **The Johannine Gospel.** John's presentation of his gospel account is distinct and peculiar. It concentrates mostly on the *Theology* (personality) of Jesus Christ – *Christology*. This book is described as the *Theological Gospel* because of its emphasis on Jesus as the Son of God. It has remained the favorite gospel among Christians today.

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CHAPTER TWO

GOD WITH US

Joseph A. Olanrewaju

Jesus Christ is unique in every sense of it. In other words, He is incomparable in His existence, personality, coming into the world, and mission. Another thing that makes Him unique is that numerous prophecies point to Him in the Old Testament (OT). One of such prophecies is found in Isaiah 7:14. It reads: "Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."¹ As indicated in Matthew 1:23 in reference to the birth of Jesus, the interpretation of Emmanuel is "God with us." In connection with this fulfilled prophecy, we need to really identify who Christ is. Christ as means of God's revelation, the fall of man that necessitated His coming to our world, the plan of redemption, and the roles of the Trinity in the plan of redemption.

Identifying Who Christ Is

Proper and authentic identification is crucial to proper and authentic relationship. Hence, one's knowledge of who Christ is determines how one appreciates and relates to Him. Obviously, this is why

Jesus asked His disciples the question 'Who do men say that the Son of man is?' When a disciple mentioned who people thought He was, He asked them again 'But who do you say I am?' (Matthew 16:13-16). So the question is who is Christ?

Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Mark 1:1; Luke 1:32, 35; John 20:31; Hebrews 1:5,8).

There are abounding testimonies in the Bible that show that Christ is the Son of God. The OT contains references that give hints on it. For instance, it is written in Psalm 2:7 that 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.' It appears that this passage puts emphasis on the descent of Jesus as from God. One of the statements of Nebuchadnezzar also suggests something on Christ being the Son of God. Nebuchadnezzar was the King of Babylon at one time. He once commanded that three Hebrew young men should be thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to worship his golden image (Daniel 3:1-23). Why he was expecting them to be consumed by the blazing fire, contrary to his expectation, he saw four, instead of three, loose men walking inside the fire. Miracle had happened. In amazement, "he said to his counselors 'Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?' They answered the king, 'True o king.' He answered, but I saw four men loose walking in the midst of the fire and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of gods'" (Daniel 3:24). In his paper presented at the Toronto Baptist Church, Third Annual King James Bible Conference, titled "Who is

the Fourth Man of Daniel 3:25", Pastor W. K. Schonhoar concludes that "Is it possible to be confused when God choose to reveal Himself? It is totally inconceivable for all powerful God to allow confusion at such an important event. The person that Nebuchadnezzar saw in the fiery furnace was none other than the Son of God."²

Apart from the hints given on Christ being the Son of God in the OT, there are clear declarations in the New Testament (NT) that Christ is the Son of God. During Jesus baptism at River Jordan, "the heavens were opened" while the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in form of a dove, and a voice which must have been that of God the Father said 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased' (Matthew 3:17). Also, when Jesus was transfigured "a bright cloud overshadowed them [Jesus and three of His disciples] and a voice from the cloud said 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him'" (Matthew 17:5). No wonder, Jesus recognized and called God His Father (John 5:17, 18, 20; 8:54; Luke 10:22).

Prior to the conception of Jesus, Angel Gabriel in his annunciation to Virgin Mary on how she had being favored to be the one who would be Christ's Mother, said 'And behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High' (Luke 1:31, 32). Even Satan acknowledged and confessed Jesus to be the Son of God. Satan's statement that 'If you are the Son of God command this stone to become bread' (Luke 4:3) suggests that he recognized Jesus Christ to be the Son of God. At

another instance, legion of devils in a mad man confessed that Jesus is the "Son of the Most High God." Here is the full reading: "And when he [the demoniac] saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped him, and crying out with a loud voice, he said 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God do not torment me', For he had said to him 'Come out of the man you unclean spirit!' And Jesus asked him 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion for we are many '" (Mark 5:6-9).

During His earthly ministry, when necessary, Jesus did not hesitate to let His audience know that He is the Son of God. When Peter, through revelation, attested of Him that 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matthew 16:16), Jesus did not reject the authenticity of the confession. Rather, He "answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed to you, but my Father who is in heaven'" (v 17). Jesus also admitted before Caiaphas, the High Priest that He is the Son of God (Matt 27:63, 64). One of the reasons why the Jews insisted that Jesus must die was because He 'has made himself the Son of God' (John 19:7; cf, Matthew 27:43). He also systematically led the healed man of John chapter 9 to believe in Him as the Son of God (John 9:35-38). In one of His encounters with the Jews, He challenged them on why they should say He was blaspheming for calling Himself the Son of God (John 10:33, 36-38). He was referring to Himself when He declared that "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

There were other people in the Bible who affirmed that Jesus is the Son of God. Peter confessed that He is “the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). As the centurion who was assigned to keep watch over Him on the cross and those who were with him saw everything that “took place, they were filled with awe and said, Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54). In his witness about Him, John stated ‘And I have borne witness that this is the Son of God’ (John 1:34). Responding to Jesus’ disclosure of him, Nathaniel exclaimed ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God!’ (John 1:49). The sorrowing Mary of John chapter 11 testified that ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world’ (John 11:27).

These myriads of witnesses are clear affirmation that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. R. D. Vine is right in his observation that “The Bible leaves no doubt in the mind of the open-hearted reader. The angel who told Mary the thrilling news that she was to bear a Son, assured both Joseph and his betrothed that ‘that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost’ and ‘that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God’ (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35). According to this divine messenger, Jesus was in fact, the Son of God.”³

Jesus Christ is God (Matthew 1:23; John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:8). Jesus is not only identified as the Son of God, but He is identified as God too. He is a member of the Trinity or Godhead. Hence, we have God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus has been identified as “God the eternal Son.”⁴ What gives identity to someone

is his attribute or character. Jesus, as God, has the same attributes with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

Jesus has divine attributes. The book of Isaiah identified Him, before He was born, as “Mighty God” and “Everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6). While He was giving the commission to preach the Gospel to the disciples, He assured them that ‘All authority in heaven has been given to me’ (Matthew 28:18; cf, John 17:2). This shows Christ as the omnipotent One. In the same context, Christ promised that ‘I am with you always’ (v. 20), an indication of His omnipresence. The writer of the book of Hebrews presents that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). In other words, Jesus Christ is immutable. He does not change. In his testimony concerning Jesus, John reveals as follows: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4), which underscores His self-existence. Christ did not mince words on His self-existence as He declared to the grieving Martha who had just lost her brother, Lazarus, that “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). Ellen G. White comments that “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed and underived.”⁵ Christ is Holy. It is for this reason that He is identified as the ‘Holy One of God’ (Mark 1:24).

Christ is eternal. The eternity is explicitly affirmed by the following Bible passages: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:2). “Jesus said unto them ‘Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am’” (John 8:58). Raoul Dederen observes that the “awareness of being ontologically divine is further

expressed in several remarkable 'I am' sayings. 'I am the bread of life' (John 6:35), 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12), 'I am the door' (John 10:7), 'I am the resurrection and the life' (verse 25), 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6), 'I am the true vine' (John 15:1)." He adds that Jesus does not merely bring or give bread, life, light, or resurrection. He is each of them."⁶ The fact that He possesses all the above attributes attests to His being divine. Christ is God.

Asides from His divine attributes, another thing that reveals Him to be God is that He received worship. It is God alone that is worthy of worship. On this basis, God's angels and God fearing believers rejected worship from those who attempted to do so in the NT. For example, the angel in Revelation chapter 19 refused and rebuked John for worshipping him. John himself relates: "Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and you brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus, worship God'" (Revelation 19:10). Peter also corrected Cornelius as he tried to worship him. Here is the narration: "When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying 'Stand up; I too am a man'" (Acts 10:26). Jesus demonstrated that Satan should not be worshipped as He refused to yield to Satan's temptation that Jesus should bow for him (Luke 4:5-8).

Contrary to the above examples, Jesus accepted worship from all categories of beings (Matthew 28:9; Mark 5:1-9; Heb 1:6; Philippians 2:10, 11). Vine's commentary on

this issue is insightful. He notes: "Only God, then, on Christ own showing, can be truly worshipped. Yet Jesus received worship on several occasions: from the leper (Matthew 8:2), from Gadarene (Mark 5:6), from disciples (Matthew 28:9), and from many others. He did not rebuke those who bowed in worship before Him. Yet Peter did. So also did angel Gabriel. Thus Jesus recognized that He was God."⁷

In addition to the above points, Christ showed that He is God by forgiving sin. During His ministry here on earth, the Jews would never take it lightly with anyone who claimed to have the authority to forgive sin, because they attributed such an act to God alone. Notwithstanding, He pronounced to the paralytic man who was brought to him for healing that, 'My son, your sins are forgiven' (Mark 2:5). The pronouncement and claim elicited questions from the Scribes who were there. They asked and concluded: 'Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sin but God alone'" (verse 7)? He revealed to them that He did so was to let them know that 'the Son of man has the authority on earth to forgive sin'" (verse 10). In this wise, Jesus made them to know that He is God by demonstrating His authority to forgive sin. Again, He showed His equality with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit as He commanded the disciples to 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Considering these Bible based evidences, it is not out of place, therefore, to insist that Jesus Christ is God.

Jesus Christ is the Creator (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16-19; Hebrews 1:2, 3). While it seems that the creatorship of Christ is implied in the OT, it is clearly revealed in the NT. As presented in John 1:1-3, Jesus is the Creator because “all things were made through him, and without him was anything made that was made.” The same fact is expressed in Colossians 1:16-19 and Hebrews 1:2. The above passages, rightly understood, indicate that Christ is not only the Creator, He is also the Sustainer of our world as He is “upholding the universe by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3).

Jesus demonstrated His Power, as the Creator, in two Sabbath miracles He performed as recorded in John chapters 5 and 9. He once declared, 'The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath, so the Son of man is the Lord of the Sabbath' (Mark 2:28). To practically manifest that the Sabbath was made for the benefit of man, through spoken word, He healed a man that had been sick for thirty eight years (Mark 2:27, 28), as He brought the creation into existence through the spoken words (Genesis 1). He also worked with clay to open the eye of a man who was blind from his birth (John 9), like He worked on clay to make man at creation (Genesis 2:7).⁸ He, as the Creator, showed His power to recreate.

Jesus Christ has dual nature (John 1:1-14; Philippians 2:5-10). Jesus is God-Man. Earlier in this work, it has been pointed out that Christ is God. Though He is God, He became Man. Therefore He is one hundred percent God

and one hundred percent Man. Here is the wonder of incarnation. The Son of God is also the Son of man.

There are Bible passages which identify Him as Man. Here are couples of them. Jesus who is the Word “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Apostle Paul wrote that He is the “mediator also between God and man, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). The same Christ was “made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7); “born of woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4). As a young boy, “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). There are instances when He referred to Himself as the Son of man (see Matthew 11:19; 20:28; Mark 1:28; 2:11; 10:45; Luke 17:22; 19:10; John 8:28; 12:34).

Apart from the above points, the humanness of Jesus was evident when He was here on earth. This assertion is supported by the following:

1. As Man, He was tired (John 4:6).
2. As Man, He felt asleep (Mark 4:38).
3. As Man, He wept (Luke 19:41; John 11:35)
4. As Man, He was afraid to die, which made Him to supplicate for help from His heavenly Father (Matthew 26:36-46; Hebrews 5:7).
5. As Man, He solicited the support of those who were close to Him like human being would in time of problems (Matthew 26:40)
6. As Man, He was tempted in all points (Luke 4:1-13; Hebrews 4:14).

7. As Man, He experienced rejection, pain and death (Luke 23).

In the entire Universe, Christ is the only One who bears the peculiar nature of God-Man.

He is truly "God with us". Ellen notes: "By His Humanity, Christ touched humanity, by His divinity, He lays hold upon the throne of God. As the Son Man, He gave us example of obedience; as the Son of God He gives us power to obey"⁹

Means of God's Revelation

There are fundamental facts and truths of life that cannot be accurately known without God choosing to reveal them to human beings. These include such fact like who God is; who man really is, why is our world in the state it is today; and the plan of God for His creation. God, as a loving God, has made available means of revelation, of which Jesus Christ is One of them, for us to know the vital truths we need to know.

Broadly speaking, means of God's revelation can be grouped into two, namely, general means and special means.¹⁰ Characteristically, general means of God's revelation are everywhere. They are not perfect means of revelation because of the effects of sin. Nature is an example of general means of God's revelation. Unlike general means of God's revelation, special means of revelation are not accessed by everyone. In other words, it is not everyone that has functional knowledge of them.

They are perfect means of revelation because of their divine nature. The Holy Bible and Jesus Christ are examples of special means of revelation. The above mentioned means of revelation (Nature, The Holy Bible and Jesus Christ) are briefly treated in this work.

Nature as a Means of Revelation

Work done by a person can advertise him. For instance, a set of furniture well made may be revealing the maker as aesthetic person. People can be led to a designer because they have seen what he has designed. Someone's works speak for him.

The nature speaks, announces, reveals and declares God's glory, power, wisdom, love etcetera. The Psalmist makes it known that, "The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declare knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; there voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their word to the end of the world" (Psalms 19:1-4). Ellen G. White affirms that "all created things declare the glory of His excellence."¹¹ So the nature speaks universally understood language about its Creator as it reveals certain attributes about Him.

Nevertheless, nature is not a perfect means of revelation, because "sin has marred God's perfect work."¹² Unless as one sees the disasters and imperfections in nature in the context of the Great Controversy, one may tend to see a powerless and non-caring God who has abandoned His created world to the caprices of the evil ones. Nature does not reveal God perfectly.

The Holy Bible as a Means of God's Revelation

God reveals Himself, His will and purpose to man in Scriptures. The Bible writers, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, penned down God's message in human language which we have as our Scriptures today (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16). The ultimate author is God. This makes it to be a perfect means of revelation. As noted by T. H. Jemison, "In Scriptures—the special record of special divine revelation—God has brought together the essentials concerning Himself."¹³ He states further that, "All knowledge necessary for salvation has been given to us in God's word, and it is authoritative revelation of divine will."¹⁴

Jesus Christ as the Means of God's Revelation

Revelation through Christ is both perfect and personal. When He came to dwell among human beings, He came to reveal to them the nature or attribute of the invisible God in a personal and relational way. Apostle John expresses that "And the word became flesh and dwell among us full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory as of the Only Son from the Father" (John 1:14).

There was once a declaration from Christ that, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). In the course of one of His intimate discussions with his disciples, one of them named Philip requested Him to show them the Father. He responded to the request and "said to him 'Have I being with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father'" (John 14:8, 9). Ellen G. White expatiates that "By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to man and to angels. He was

the Word of God—God's thought made audible."¹⁵ T. H. Jemison remarks that, "Taking together, Jesus' life and teachings constitute the fullest revelation of God that man could receive. The incarnation of Christ revealed the length to which God would go to draw men to Himself. His sinlessness demonstrates the power available to all men to lift them and keep them above sin. His death revealed the awfulness of sin and the magnitude of God's love for sinners. His resurrection proved that God's plan will bring victory over death and the grave. There could be no clearer revelation."¹⁶ Purposeful studying of and contemplation on the life and teachings of Christ bring transforming illumination into one's life.

The Fall of Man and the Plan of Redemption

There was a time when the world was in a perfect state because God created it so (Genesis 1;2). It was a world without disorderliness, hostility, unhealthy fear, pain, sickness, and death. This is not the case today. The world is in a fallen state with all its attended evils. Actually, the world is in a fallen state because man fell. The only solution to this is God's plan of redemption that is made possible through the coming of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Relevant questions that one may ask are: How did the fall happen? What are its results? When was the plan of redemption in place?

The Fall of Man

Disobedience to the clear command of God was the cause of the fall. Rebellion and sin originated with Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:11-19).¹⁷ For this reason, Lucifer

and his angels were driven from heaven (Revelation 12:7-10; Jude 6). Lucifer came to the world to deceive man to disobey God. God created Adam and Eve as intelligent moral beings with the power to exercise freedom of choice. He commanded them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17). To go against God's command would bring upon them penalties. Through his sophistry, Lucifer deceived Eve as follows:

1. By using a medium, the serpent (Genesis 3:1, 17), as he often suggests things that can make one to fall through different means today.
2. By beginning his argument, asking question as he used God's statement, wrongly though (verse 1), as he often makes some people to quote from God's words to justify their evil practices like drinking and adulterous acts today.
3. By assuring Eve that disobeying God would make her to be at a vantage and better position, rather than experiencing death (verses 4, 5), like he often convinces people that disobedience would make them to have better life today.¹⁸

Charles Caldwell Ryrie observes that Eve considered Satan's suggestion based on her own rationalization. She was convinced that "it would be desirable, even necessary to eat the fruit" and ", that "having justified what she was about to do, she took and ate it"¹⁹ Adam also took and ate against God's will. This sinful act caused the fall.

What are the effects of the fall? The effects of the fall have vertical and horizontal dimensions, then physical and spiritual dimensions. The fall resulted into the following:

1. God's wrath and penalties against sin (Genesis 3:13-19; Romans 1:18).
2. Broken relation between God and man (Genesis 3:23; Isaiah 59:1); which seems to occur at both physical and spiritual levels (Genesis 3:8; Exodus 33:20-23).
3. Physical and eternal death (Genesis 3:19; Roman 5:12; 6:23).
4. Depravity of human nature (Psalm 51:5; Romans 7:18-24)
5. Polluted and cursed environment (Genesis 3:17-18).
6. Suffering and degeneration (Genesis 3:19).
7. The need for Jesus to come and die as substitute for sin (Genesis 3:15)
8. Loss of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23-24).

The effects of the fall were all encompassing and devastating. None could handle them but God and God alone.

The Plan of Redemption

Sin is costly. It is expensive to go against God's will. No one is capable of paying for his redemption. No person is wise enough to handle the confusion that sin introduces into his life. This is why God's intervention in putting in place the plan of redemption becomes crucial. In fact, the plan of redemption was there before man fell. Ellen G.

White points out that, "The plan of redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of 'the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal' Rom 16:25 R. V. It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God's throne. From the beginning, God and Christ knew of the apostasy of Satan, and of the fall of man through the deceptive power of the apostate. God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, 'that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life' John 3:16."²⁰ Therefore, based on God's plan of redemption, man's redemption from sin and its effects is accomplished through Jesus Christ, called Emmanuel, meaning "God with us."

Reason for Incarnation in the Plan of Redemption

If there had been no sin there would not have been incarnation of Christ. He was specially fashioned to handle different issues that resulted from the fall. Though God, He came in human flesh. Basic reasons why He became incarnated are considered here.

1. God warned Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Eating from it would lead to death as penalty (Genesis 2:15-17). They disobeyed, and penalty, which is death, came upon human race (Roman 6:3). In order to handle the problem, Christ came in human flesh to suffer

and die on behalf sinful humanity. He became our substitute to pay the penalty of sin for human race (Hebrew 2:9).

2. Satan misrepresented God's character and His law. He presented God as selfish and tyrannical, rather than a loving God. He argued that God commanding His created beings to keep His moral law "was unnecessary and restrictive to personal liberty, then the Creator must have had ulterior motives in subjecting intelligent creatures to its guidelines."²¹ He insinuated further, that maybe God would "gain a sense of power by arbitrarily regimenting the creation under blind obedience."²²

Jesus came in human form to show God as God of love and justice. He showed Him as God who is not insulated to human's problems. Through His life and teachings, Jesus revealed God perfectly. Ellen G. White explains that, "The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadow might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan's deceptive power was to be broken. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make known upon the world's dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise 'with healing in his wing, (Mal 4:2).'"²³

She goes on in her explanation that, "Since Jesus came to dwell with us, we know that God is acquainted with our trials, and sympathizes with our griefs. Every son and daughter of Adam may understand that our Creator is the friend of sinners. For in every doctrine of grace, every promise of joy, every deed of love, every divine attraction presented in the Saviour's life on earth, we see 'God with us'"²⁴

3. Another reason why Christ became man was to demonstrate to us that it is possible to obey God's law. As man, He lived without committing sin, in spite of His being tempted in all points (Hebrews 4:15). He became our example on the issue of obedience. It has been observed that, "Satan represents God's law of love as a law of selfishness. He declares that it is impossible for us to obey its precepts. The fall of our first parents, with all the woe that has resulted, he charges upon the Creator, leading man to look upon God as the author of sin, and suffering, and death. Jesus was to unveil this deception. As one of us He was to give example of obedience. For this He took upon Himself our nature, and passed through our experiences. 'In all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren' (Heb 2:17)."²⁵ Living a life of obedience to God's law, "as man, He met temptation, and overcame in the strength given Him from God."²⁶ In this way, He "made plain to men the character of

God's law. . . . His life testifies that it is possible for us also to obey the law of God."²⁷

Role of Trinity in the Plan of Redemption

The plan of redemption is purposely and accurately executed as each Person of the Trinity carries out His specific role. The specific role the God the Father performs in the plan of redemption is that He gives. Sacrifice for sin was needed. God the Father responded to this need by giving His Son Jesus Christ to be the sacrifice for sin. It is written that, "For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

While God the Father gives, God the Son yields. Though God asked Jesus to come and be the ransom for the sin of humanity, He could have refused to come. But He surrendered Himself to be crucified on the cross for sin. Paul showed in his letter to the Philippians that Jesus Christ, "who, though was in form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8). Jesus Himself declares: "For this the Father loves me, because I lay down my life," He adds that "I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:17-18). Therefore Jesus yields His life to be ransom for sin.

Though God the Father gives, and God the Son yields, the operation of God the Holy Spirit upon human's mind is indispensable for his salvation. Man cannot appreciate God's gift of His Son, and Christ yielding Himself to die for sin, unless through the impression of the Holy Spirit. No single soul can be converted without the ministry of the Holy Spirit. As such, God the Spirit impresses upon human's mind what God the Father and God the Son have done for the world. We read from the Holy Bible that when the Holy Spirit comes, "he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8); and that "he will guide you into all the truth" (Verse 13). Jesus indicates further that "even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me" (John 15:26).

As God the Father gives, God the Son yields and God the Holy Spirit impresses. All of them play essential roles in the redemption of every single soul that is saved. This informs the baptismal formula given by Jesus Christ. Every converted soul who is baptized should be baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). This is in recognition of the roles that each Person of the Trinity has performed in man's redemption. Though man fell, came under the bondage of sin and Satan, Christ's incarnation made man's redemption possible. In the comprehensive plan of redemption, "God with us" is the eternal Gift given by God the Father for our

redemption, while God the Holy Spirit who impresses makes the roles of the Giver and the Gift effectual unto redemption from sin.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is "God with us." The God-man, the One through whom we have perfect revelation of God. As God, He has all the attributes of God. As the Creator, all things exist through Him and for Him. As incarnated Being, His becoming Man who lived among us, exposes Satan's lies about God's character, God's law and possibility of keeping the moral law.

Therefore, "God with us" is the key to knowing God as we should know Him. "God with us" is the solution to the problem of sin. "God with us" is the truth that exposes Satan's deceptions about issues of life. "God with us" is the only One Who brings meaning in the midst of meaninglessness, hope in the midst of hopelessness; rest in the midst of restlessness; joy in the midst of sorrow; order in the midst of disorderliness, etcetera.

Emmanuel, "God with us", makes life worth living. To accept Him is to accept God's plan for one's life. To reject Him is to embrace Satan's plan for one's life. Emmanuel, "God with us", the God-man is the answer to all the crucial questions of life that have to do with eternity. Study to know more of Him and be blessed to become a blessing.

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- ²⁰Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 22
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- ²⁵*Ibid.*
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CHAPTER THREE

“THE FULNESS OF THE TIME”

James A. O. Babalola

Thinking about the idea of “The fullness of the time,” questions that come to mind are which Time? Or what have I to do with the time? When is the Time? And what is the importance of the time? The two phrases used 'when the time had fully come' and 'in the fullness of time' essentially means the same thing. The 'fullness of time' is referring to the right, appropriate, or fitting time for an event to occur, often in the light of specific predictive prophecy. Some whose presuppositional judgment will not permit them to believe that anything can be predicted ahead of time must therefore find other explanations such as Deutero-Isaiah for the prophecies contained therein, written in the time of the fulfillment and thus not being predictive at all. The problem with this theory occurs when the actual evidence like the Dead Sea Scrolls, an ancient copy with all of Isaiah turn up, or the prophecies of Daniel clearly pointing to the Messiah coming and being 'cut off' i.e. killed in 36 or 37AD. Thus, time itself does not really get full but what the terminology means is that when God has

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said the time is right or ripe, something will happen, especially if He has said it will. The time preceding the event is thus like a glass of water slowly filling up as the time rolls on until when the glass is full it has reached the time for the designated event to occur. The New Testament thus particularly relates this terminology to Jesus Christ whose incarnation as the Messiah was previously foretold by the prophets. It seems also that there were some who recognized this such as Simeon and Anna and who were in a sense 'ready' for their Messiah.

“Before the time”

Biblical History recorded that the systems of heathenism were losing their hold upon the people. Men were weary of pageant and fable. They longed for a religion that could satisfy the heart. While the light of truth seemed to have departed from among men, there were souls who were looking for light, though filled with perplexity and sorrow. They were thirsting for knowledge of the living God, for some assurance of a life beyond the grave.

As the Jews had departed from God, had their faith grow dim, and hope had well-nigh ceased to illuminate the future. The words of the prophets were uncomprehended. To the masses of the people, death was a dreadful mystery; beyond it was uncertainty and gloom. It is not alone the wailing of the mothers of Bethlehem, but the cry from the great heart of humanity, that was borne to the prophet across the centuries,—the voice heard in Ramah, "lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." Matt. 2:18. In "the region and shadow

of death," men sat unsolaced. With longing eyes they looked for the coming of the Deliverer, when the darkness should be dispelled, and the mystery of the future should be made plain.

Outside of the Jewish nation there were men who foretold the appearance of a divine instructor. These men were seeking truth, and to them the Spirit of Inspiration was imparted. One after another, like stars in the darkened heavens, such teachers had arisen. Their words of prophecy had kindled hope in the hearts of thousands of the Gentile world.

For hundreds of years the Scriptures had been translated into the Greek language, then widely spoken throughout the Roman Empire. The Jews were scattered everywhere, and their expectation of the Messiah's coming was, to some extent, shared by the Gentiles. Among those whom the Jews styled heathen were men who had a better understanding of the Scripture prophecies concerning the Messiah than had the teachers in Israel. There were some who hoped for His coming as a deliverer from sin. Philosophers endeavored to study into the mystery of the Hebrew economy. But the bigotry of the Jews hindered the spread of the light. Intent on maintaining the separation between themselves and other nations, they were unwilling to impart the knowledge they still possessed concerning the symbolic service.

The true Interpreter must come. The One whom all these types prefigured must explain their significance. Through nature, through types and symbols, through patriarchs and prophets, God had spoken to the world. Lessons must be given to humanity in the language of

humanity. The Messenger of the covenant must speak. His voice must be heard in His own temple. Christ must come to utter words which should be clearly and definitely understood. He, the author of truth, must separate truth from the chaff of man's utterance, which had made it of no effect. The principles of God's government and the plan of redemption must be clearly defined. The lessons of the Old Testament must be fully set before men.

Among the Jews there were yet steadfast souls, descendants of that holy line through whom a knowledge of God had been preserved. These still looked for the hope of the promise made unto the fathers. They strengthened their faith by dwelling upon the assurance given through Moses, "A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you." Acts 3:22. Again, they read how the Lord would anoint One "to preach good tidings unto the meek," "to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives," and to declare the "acceptable year of the Lord." Isa. 61:1, 2.

They read how He would "set judgment in the earth," how the isles should "wait for His law," how the Gentiles should come to His light, and kings to the brightness of His rising. Isa. 42:4; 60:3. The dying words of Jacob filled them with hope: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come." Gen. 49:10. The waning power of Israel testified that the Messiah's coming was at hand. The prophecy of Daniel pictured the glory of His reign over an

empire which should succeed all earthly kingdoms; and, said the prophet, "It shall stand forever." Dan. 2:44. While few understood the nature of Christ's mission, there was a widespread expectation of a mighty prince who should establish his kingdom in Israel, and who should come as a deliverer to the nations.

Through heathenism, Satan had for ages turned men away from God; but he won his great triumph in perverting the faith of Israel. By contemplating and worshiping their own conceptions, the heathen had lost knowledge of God, and had become more and more corrupt. So it was with Israel. The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of every heathen religion; it had then become the principle of the Jewish religion. Satan implanted this principle. Wherever it is held, men have no barrier against sin.

The message of salvation is communicated to men through human agencies. But the Jews had sought to make a monopoly of the truth which is eternal life. They hoarded the living manna, and it had turned to corruption. The religion which they tried to shut up to themselves became an offense. They robbed God of His glory, and defrauded the world by a counterfeit of the gospel. They refused to surrender themselves to God for the salvation of the world, and became agents of Satan for its destruction. The people whom God had called to be the pillar and ground of the truth then became representatives of Satan. They were doing the work that Satan desired them to do, taking a course to misrepresent the character of God, and caused the

world to look upon Him as a tyrant. The very priests who ministered in the temple had lost sight of the significance of the service they performed. They had ceased to look beyond the symbol to the thing signified.

In presenting the sacrificial offerings, they were as actors in a play. The ordinances which God Himself had appointed were made the means of blinding the mind and hardening the heart. God could do no more for man through these channels. The whole system must be swept away. The deception of sin had reached its height. All the agencies for depraving the souls of men had been put in operation. The Son of God, looking upon the world beheld suffering and misery; with pity He saw how men had become victims of satanic cruelty. He looked with compassion upon those who were being corrupted, murdered, and lost. Man had chosen a ruler who chained them to his car as captives. Bewildered and deceived, they were moving on in gloomy procession toward eternal ruin,—to death in which there was no hope of life, toward night to which come no morning. Satanic agencies were incorporated with men. The bodies of human beings, made for the dwelling place of God, had become the habitation of demons. The senses, the nerves, the passions, the organs of men, were worked by supernatural agencies in the indulgence of the vilest lust. The very stamp of demons was impressed upon the countenances of men. Human faces reflected the expression of the legions of evil with which they were possessed. Such was the prospect upon which the world's Redeemer looked. What a spectacle for Infinite Purity to behold! Sin had become a science, and vice was

consecrated as a part of religion. Rebellion had its roots deep into the heart, and the hostility of man was most violent against heaven. It was demonstrated before the universe that, apart from God, humanity could not be uplifted. A new element of life and power must be impacted by Him who made the world.

With intense interest, the unfallen worlds had watched to see Jehovah arise, and sweep away the inhabitants of the earth. And if God should do this, Satan was ready to carry out his plan for securing to himself the allegiance of heavenly beings. Satan had declared that the principles of God's government make forgiveness impossible. Had the world been destroyed, he would have claimed that his accusations were proved right. Satan is ready to cast blame upon God, and to spread his rebellion to the worlds above. But instead of destroying the world, God sent His Son to save it. Though corruption and defiance might be seen in every part of the alien province, a way for its recovery was provided. At the very crisis, when Satan seemed about to triumph, Christ came with the embassy of divine grace.

In every age, hour, minute, or second, God's love is being ever exercised towards the fallen race. Notwithstanding men's inclination to sin, the signals of mercy had been continually exhibited. And when the fullness of the time had come, the Deity was glorified by pouring upon the world a flood of healing grace that was never to be obstructed or withdrawn till the plan of salvation was fulfilled. Satan was exulting that he had

succeeded in debasing the image of God in humanity. Consequently, Jesus came to restore in man the image of his Maker. None but Christ can bring reformation to character that has been ruined by sin. Christ actually came to expel the demons that had controlled the will of man. He came to lift humanity up from the dust, to reshape and reform the marred character to His glory and honour.

“The Revelation of A Saviour in Gen.3:15” In the Bible, according to Gen. 3:15

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (KJV).

The Saviour's coming was first foretold in Eden. When Adam and Eve heard the promise, they longed for its speedy fulfillment. This first couple in Eden welcomed their first-born son, hoping that he might be the Deliverer. But the fulfillment of the promise appeared tarried. Biblical history revealed that those who first received the good news died without the sight. Similarly, in the days of Enoch, the promise was repeated through patriarchs and prophets. Yet the hope of His appearing was proved abortive. In same vein the prophecy of Daniel revealed the time of His advent, but not all rightly could interpret the message. Century after century passed away, it appeared as if the voices of the prophets ceased. The hand of the oppressor was heavy upon Israel, and many tended to exclaim, "The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth." Ezek. 12:22.

God's Purposes Know No Haste and No Delay.

Through the symbols of the great darkness and the smoking furnace, God had revealed to Abraham the bondage of Israel in Egypt, and had declared that the time of their sojourning should be four hundred years. "Afterward," He said, "shall they come out with great substance." Gen. 15:14. Against that word, all the power of Pharaoh's proud empire battled in vain. On "the selfsame day" appointed in the divine promise, "it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." Ex. 12:41. So in heaven's council, the hour for the coming of Christ had been determined.

When the great clock of time pointed to that hour, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son." Providence had directed the movements of nations, and the tide of human impulse and influence, until the world was ripe for the coming of the Deliverer. The nations were united under one government. One language was widely spoken, and was everywhere recognized as the language of literature. From all lands the Jews of the dispersion gathered to Jerusalem for the annual feasts. As these returned to the places of their sojourn, they could spread throughout the world the tidings of the Messiah's coming.

Evidences of the Fullness of Time

(i) *Political Preparation:* The world was united under one empire (Rome). The world was on a neighbourhood. There were no political barriers of frontiers. Three factors contributed to this:

1. Roman Peace (*Pax Romana*)

2. *Marvelous Transportation and Great Roads* – There were highways connecting all parts of the Roman Empire. These provided convenience and safety of travel.
 3. *Common Language* – The prevalence of Greek as a universal language helped in the spread of the gospel. Every Roman province was bilingual. *Koine Dialektos* (common dialect) was spoken.
- (ii) *Economic Preparation:* There was economic depression.

Despite its luxury and magnificence, the Roman Empire was plagued with poverty due to the aftermath of war, great burden of taxation (both civil and religious), and high rate of slavery (2 out of every 3 persons on the streets of Rome were slaves).

At this time of economic depression, when many were so desperately worn and care-ridden about material things, about the question of where 'tomorrow's bread is going to come from' – Christ came to give hope and teach how to trust in God.

- (iii) *Religious Preparation:* Religion-wise, the world was prepared for Christ's first coming through the following channels:
- a. Translation of the OT into Greek (Septuagint);
 - b. Universal sense of the need for a revival of religion (Phenomenon of Caesar or Emperor Worship);

- c. Jewish hope for the Messiah was higher than in previous centuries;
 - d. The widespread dispersion of Jews throughout the empire;
 - e. The fulfillment of the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24.
- (iv) *Moral Preparation:* The world was sunk in moral hopelessness; sin had marred the image of God in man. The fullness of the time had come. Humanity, becoming more degraded through ages of transgression, called for the coming of the Redeemer. Satan had been working to make the gulf deep and impassable between earth and heaven. By his falsehoods he had emboldened men in sin. It was his purpose to wear out the forbearance of God, and to extinguish His love for man, so that He would abandon the world to satanic jurisdiction. Satan was seeking to shut out from men a knowledge of God, to turn their attention from the temple of God, and to establish his own kingdom. His strife for supremacy had seemed to be almost wholly successful. It is true that in every generation God had His agencies. Even among the heathen there were men through whom Christ was working to uplift the people from their sin and degradation. But these men were despised and hated. Many of them suffered a violent death. The dark shadow that Satan had cast over the world grew deeper and deeper.

Conclusion

When Jesus was born, it was indeed the fullness of time. Underline the phrase "fullness of time," and in your margin record: *Hebrews – Scriptures; Greeks – language; Romans – peace*. These will remind you of the providential preparation of God in anticipation of the sending of His Son. Satan was exulting that he had succeeded in debasing the image of God in humanity. Then Jesus came to restore in man the image of his Maker. None but Christ can fashion anew the character that has been ruined by sin. He came to expel the demons that had controlled the will. He came to lift us up from the dust, to reshape the marred character after the pattern of His divine character, and to make it beautiful with His own glory.

The final dispensation of the gospel is known as the dispensation of the fullness of times. It is an age in which the Lord will "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on the earth". Every key, power, and authority ever dispensed from heaven to men on earth, which is necessary for their eternal salvation will be restored at this time. All knowledge that have ever been revealed will in due course come to light in this final dispensation. Galatians 4:4 (KJV) But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, Ephesians 1:10 (KJV) So, the dispensation of the fullness of time he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.

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CHAPTER FOUR

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH OF JESUS

Ucheawaji G. Josiah

The birth and life of the Jesus is such that has been espoused by the Old Testament prophets. One of these Old Testament prophets is Isaiah. In Isaiah's prophecy of chapter 7-12, we see that this corpus introduces a crisis that was eminent that is, the confederation of Syria and Ephraim against Judah (1 Kgs 16), with Edomite and Philistine campaigns against the Southern Kingdom furthering the disaster (2 Chron. 28). In the midst of this calamity, Isaiah the prophet offered Ahaz the king, an opportunity to ask a sign for himself from the Lord his God and that he should make the sign deep as Sheol or high as heaven (7:11). On the contrary, Ahaz the king of Judah sought to take a political gamble with Assyria. However, the sign rejected by Ahaz was given by the Lord and spoken through Isaiah thus: "a virgin will be with child and bear a son" (Isa. 7:14).¹

In light of Ahaz' unbelief, Isaiah went ahead and spoke of the Lord's plan to go ahead with His programme but Judah will be destroyed. Hence, a child shall be born whose birth shall be a sign of judgement (Jn. 16:8-11).²

Nevertheless, as a fulfillment of this virgin birth prophecy, the New Testament offers glimpses for a better and clearer view of the birth and life of Jesus, the virgin Son. However, the focus of this chapter is not to prove the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, but to show why the world Jesus entered looked inhospitable, to show the significance of Jesus' "silent years" in Nazareth and to show how Jesus' boyhood influences prepared Him for His later ministry.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS (LK 2:1-20)

With the efforts of John the Baptist, the son of Zachariah, the forerunner of Jesus, the tidings of the birth and mission of Jesus had been spread abroad. Yet the city of God (Jerusalem) was not getting ready to welcome her redeemer (Jn. 1:11). Their level of indifference was well articulated by White when she wrote:

With amazement the heavenly messengers beheld the indifference of that people whom God had called to communicate to the world the light of sacred truth. The Jewish nation had been preserved as a witness that Christ was to be born of the seed of Abraham and of David's line; yet they knew not that His coming was now at hand. In the temple the morning and evening sacrifice daily pointed to the Lamb of God; yet even here was no preparation to receive Him. The priests and teachers of the nation knew not that the greatest event of the ages was about to take place. They rehearsed their meaningless prayers, and performed the rites of worship to be seen by men, but in their

strife for riches and worldly honor they were not prepared for the revelation of the Messiah.³

From the excerpt above, the unawareness of the coming of the Messiah was evidently showcased by the people of God, especially by those (priests and teachers) in whose custody the responsibility of spiritual care was entrusted. The generality of the people became engrossed in formalism – meaningless prayers and worship rites – without experiencing the power in their religious persuasion (2 Tim 3:4, 5) and as such were oblivious of the coming of Jesus through the loins of David.

Prior to the announcement of Jesus' birth, Elizabeth, a relation to Mary, had conceived after an announcement of childbirth by angel Gabriel in Judea that she would conceive (Lk 1:5). Consequent on that, she hid herself for five (5) months after conception in amazement for what God had done for her at old age. Nevertheless, in Nazareth, a town unknown to people of the Old Testament times, in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the announcement of the birth of Jesus was delivered first to the Virgin Mary (Lk 1:23-26).⁴ When the time for delivery was almost due, Caesar Augustus became an agent for the fulfillment of God's purpose in bringing Mary, the mother of Jesus, to Bethlehem.⁵ The prophetic words of Micah 5:2 indicated that Israel's messianic ruler would be born in the hometown of David. So, when Caesar Augustus at Rome, gave the decree that the entire world be registered for taxation, Mary and Joseph journeyed from Nazareth to Bethlehem (Lk 2:1-6). It is noteworthy that at the time of

Christ's birth in that small village called Bethlehem of Judea, Quirinius was the governor of Syria, while Herod the Great was ruling in Judea (Lk 2:2; 1:5).

The reign of Herod the Great in Judea, (Mt 2:1-22; Lk 1:5; Act 23:35) gives insight into some of the crucibles inherent in the account of the birth of Jesus the Christ. Herod the Great was the son of Antipater, an Idumaeen, and Cypros, an Arabian of noble descent. In the 47 B.C., Julius Caesar made Antipater, a "crafty Idumaeen," procurator of Judea, who divided his territories between his four sons. Galilee fell to the lot of one of his sons – Herod the Great, who was afterwards appointed tetrarch of Judea by Mark Antony (41 B.C.), and also king of Judea by the Roman senate (37 B.C.).⁶

As noted in the introductory part of this chapter, we see that at the time of the prophecy of the birth of Emmanuel (Isa 7:14), there was an eminent crisis confronting the people of Judah (1 Kgs 16; 2 Chron. 28) who indeed needed deliverance from Yahweh. In the same vein, Jesus accepted humanity when the human race had been weakened by about 4000 years of evil and sin. Like every child of Adam, He accepted the results of working of the law of heredity (Gal 4:4). Only few were really ready to see the Messiah though many expected Him. The news of the birth was announced by angels to poor, common shepherds – not the important people of the world like Kings, Priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, etc. These shepherds spread the news of the birth (Lk 2:17, 18).⁷ Seeing how the spiritual leaders of Israel and almost the entire nation of Israel neglected their God-given responsibility of care resulting from their unawareness of the coming of the

Messiah, what could you do as a child of God to avoid falling into the same trap they fell?

THE VISIT OF THE WISEMEN (MATT. 2: 1 - 12)

The birth of Jesus was announced in a supernatural manner not only to Mary and Joseph, not only to the Jewish shepherds, but also to Gentiles, for "Wisemen from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (Mt 2:1, 2).⁸ The word which has been rendered "wisemen" in the King James Version and the English Revised Version (the American Standard Revised Version "Wisemen") is "Magi." *Magi*, is the plural of *magus*, the high priestly caste of Persia; *wise man* of the Magian religion (Mt 2:1); they could also be *magician*, *sorcerer*, one using witchcraft or magic arts (Ac 13:6).⁹ In the Hebrew, the word *magos* is rendered as *mag* with its plural as *magim*; a word of Indo-Germanic origin though regarded now by many as of Babylonian origin. Sometimes, it is the name given by the Babylonians (Chaldaeans), Medes, Persians, and others, to the wisemen, teachers, priests, physicians, astrologers, seers, interpreters of dreams, augurs, soothsayers, sorcerers etc. in fact, Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon played the role of "Magi" (Gen. 41: 8; Dan. 2: 1, 2).¹⁰ Nevertheless, in the New Testament the name *magi* is given to the oriental wisemen (astrologers) who, having discovered by the rising of a remarkable star that the Messiah had just been born, came to Jerusalem to worship him (Matt. 2:1, 7, 16). **The Star** (Matt. 2:10) the wisemen saw was a group of angels.¹¹ At their arrival at the

birth place of Jesus, they gave Him some special gifts (Matt. 2:11) such as: **Gold** - which represents Royalty, Sign of Substance and Kingship; **Frankincense** - which stood for His Life, Inner Treasure of Thought and Influence (2 Cor. 2: 15) and finally, **Myrrh** - which represents Sacrifice and Death, Symbol of His Suffering and Death (Jn. 19: 38-40). Possibly because of the three (3) gifts given to baby Jesus by the Wisemen, ancient legend thus holds that the Wisemen were three. It even went further to give their names as: Gasper, Melchior, and Balthasar. However, the Bible did not give a specific number and there was no mention of their names. However, the Wisemen were acquainted with Jewish religious rites and the coming of the Saviour. They came with a worshipful spirit - a sign of submission. Their worship symbolized the submission of the Gentiles to the Messiah. We observe here, that the birth of Christ was announced or revealed by God to both Jews (shepherds) and Gentiles (Wisemen). The Wisemen though were requested by Herod to bring him news about the new born king (Matt. 2:7-8), they did not return to Herod (Matt. 2:12). And the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, asking him to take the child to Egypt for refuge (Matt. 2: 13). This warning was heeded by Joseph and Mary. Hostility began toward the boy Jesus. Just to get at Him, Herod ordered the killing of the children who were 2 years and below (Matt. 2:16). But why do you think Herod wanted Jesus dead? This was a design by the Devil through the Jewish leaders and Herod which fired back at them. After the death of Herod the Great, Joseph and Mary returned to Nazareth (Matt. 2: 21- 23). There were two groups of people that encountered Jesus at His birth. The

First Group was a Hostile Group who rejected Him. They were: The Inn-Keepers, Jewish Leaders and Herod. The Second Group was a Friendly Group who welcomed Him. These were: Shepherds, Wisemen, Simeon and Anna.

THE DEDICATION (LUKE 2:21-38)

The Heb: *chanukkah*, as used for dedication, means "initiation" or "consecration." Its Greek (Grk) equivalent is *qadhesh*, meaning "to be clean," or "sanctify". The Heb: *cherem*, also used for dedication denotes more of "a thing devoted (to God)." It is often used in Hebrew of the consecration of persons. But usually in the English Versions of the Bible, it is used of the "setting apart of things to a sacred use" (Num 7:10; Dan 3:2-3; 2 Sam 8:11' 2 Kgs 12:4; 1 Kgs 8:63; Ezr 6:16; Ex 29:44; Neh 12:27; Deut 20:5; Ezek 44:29).¹² According to Numbers 3:13 dedication as a feast, was a memorial of God's deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. It also foreshadowed the deliverance from sin and death. Accordingly, in the Old Testament times, childbirth was often associated with the mother's uncleanness (Lev 12:1-8). The mother of the child is considered impure and anything she touched was considered same. Nevertheless, the duration of her uncleanness is determined by the sex of the child born. For instance, if the child were a male, her period of impurity will last 40 days and if she were a female child, the mother's uncleanness will extend to 80 days. However, after the period of purification was over (40 or 80 days as the case may be), the new mother was required to bring two offerings to the Tent of Meeting. These two offerings were to be: a burnt offering and a purification

offering (Lev 12:6-8).¹³ This Levitical legislation became evident during the birth of Jesus. When Jesus was born, after the period of purification, in obedience to commands about the ritual purification of mothers after childbirth, Mary and Joseph went up to Jerusalem to offer the sacrifice of a *pair of doves* or *two young pigeons* (Lk 2:22, 24; Lev 12:1-8).

The type of offering they gave showed their level of poverty. Since they could not afford the lamb that was the usual command (Lev 12:8), they presented the minimum offering of the poor - *pair of doves* or *two young pigeons*.¹⁴ Before this time, a prophet and a prophetess had been in the mood of expectancy for the coming of the Messiah. Prophet Simeon had hoped to see the Messiah before he would die. This has taken years, and he was growing quite elderly. Each morning he prepared himself and walked up the slope to the temple. With much expectation for the Messiah, he watched and prayed. As it were the belief of the Jews, the Messiah will unexpectedly appear in the temple for judgement (Mal 3:1).¹⁵ With this in his mind, Simeon observed to see whether the Messiah would walk through the temple court at anytime because Jerusalem's Temple was a busy place. He watched as farmers brought in baskets of vegetables and grains – the firstfruits of their labours. Sooner, a young couple like many other young couples, walked in to make sacrifice for their firstborn son. Although every child was brought to the Temple for dedication, this couple and their child looked unusual. Simeon got the promptings that this was the Messiah, the Saviour for whom he had been waiting. Though he was expecting a man, the Messiah had to begin as a child. So he boldly approached the couple, greeting them with a smile, then took the boy and pronounced a heartfelt blessing for

him who would save the world.¹⁶ The welcoming attitude and testimonies of Simeon and Anna (a prophetess) was of special significance (Lk 2: 26-38). They testified to the Messiahship of Christ (Lk 2:30). Simeon said Christ's incarnation is meant for the rise and fall of many in Israel (Lk 2:34). Note that other names of Christ include: Consolation of Israel (Lk 2: 25), Shiloh (Gen 49:10), The Peace –Giver (Lk 2:29), Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6), Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5) etc.

JESUS' BOYHOOD INFLUENCES (Luke 2:39, 40)

Jesus studied from Nature, and Scriptures. His mother was His first human teacher. Although the Jews were bi-lingual, that is, they spoke Greek and Hebrew, Jesus spoke Aramaic. This is certain because of some of His Aramaic expressions the gospel writers recorded; e.g. “Talita Cumi” which means “Little girl, I say to you, Get up” (Mark 5:41), “Ephphatha” which means “Be opened” (Mark 7: 34), “Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani” which could be translated “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15: 34). Professionally, Jesus was a carpenter of Nazareth. He prepared yokes and plows and cottage and chairs. According to legend, over the door of Jesus' carpenter's shop there was the sign or inscription that reads, “My yokes are easy” (Matt. 11: 30). There is a great admonition that comes to us in view of Christ's professional conduct: whatever the area(s) you are talented in or profession you wish to embark upon, please do it dedicatedly. It is for your own good. Jesus came from a big family (Matt. 13: 55ff; Mark 6). Traditionally, however, Jesus' brothers were identified as: James (Jacob), Joseph

(Joses), Simon, and Judas. His sisters were Melkha and Eskha. He did not attend the synagogue school (rabbinical school). His mother was His first human teacher.¹⁷ Apart from that, He was self-taught. Since childhood, He acted independently of rabbinical laws. The OT was His constant study. His watchword was "Thus saith the Lord". "It is written" was His person for every action that varied from the family custom. His brothers sided with the rabbis and this brought conflict between them and Jesus (Jn. 7:5). Note: "Jesus was wise to discern evil, and strong to resist it."¹⁸ Christ's good virtues and life earned Him credibility which drew many people to hear Him when His earthly ministry began. Read also, 'True Education' in *Desire of Ages* 69:3.

HIS FATHER'S BUSINESS (Luke 2:41-51)

At 12, like all Jewish children, Jesus became a "Son of the Law" and could attend religious festivals (Lk 2:41-43).¹⁹ The major festivals were: (1) *Passovers* or the *Nisan* observed from the 14th - 21st of the Jewish 1st Month which is our -March/ April. (2) *Pentecost, Weeks* or *Sivan*, observed on the 6th day of the Jewish 3rd Month which is between May/June. (3) *Tabernacles, Booths* or *Tishri* observed from 15th - 21st of the Jewish 7th Month which is between Sept/Oct.

When Jesus was twelve (12), he attended the Passover feast and did not go home with the parents who thought He had gone home with a relation but did not find him. After three days of search, they found him in the temple at Jerusalem sitting in the midst of teachers both hearing them and asking them questions (Lk 2:43-46).

Seeing Him in such gathering, His parents were amazed and His mother said to Him "Son, why have You thus dealt with us? Behold Your father and I have sought You sorrowing" (Lk 2: 48). But He replied "How is it that you sought Me? Know you not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Lk 2:49). These words show that at this time, at age twelve, Jesus had been aware that God is His Father, that is, His Sonship to God was clear to Him. In fact, these words sum up Jesus' whole life - from His childhood to the crucifixion, He was really about His Father's business.

Looking at how Jesus at a very early age began to act for Himself in the formation of His character, (and not even respect and love for His parents could turn Him from obedience to God's word [Lu 2:49]), what are some of the lessons that you could glean from this for your life when you are faced with a choice conflicting with God's purpose for you?

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Opeyemi T. Oladosu

The Synoptic Gospels relate the story of Jesus' baptism at the beginning of His public ministry (Matt.3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22).¹ The word “baptize” is a loanword from the Greek term *baptizo* which means to “immerse”, and not “to pour” or “to sprinkle”.² Simply, baptism is a public identification with Jesus and as such, it pictures the death of Jesus, His burial, and His resurrection.³

However, prior to the New Testament era, a ritual cleansing was instituted for the purification of gentile converts to Judaism.⁴ Also, the Essenes at Qumran followed the practice of immersing both members and converts.⁵ This suggests that baptism was not new, and John did not invent the rite. Baptism was accepted when John came, for the deputation sent to question John “the Baptist” did not challenge the rite but only his authority to perform it (John 1:19-28).⁶ People in Old Testament times understood baptism to symbolically wash away sin. John the Baptist did not restrict his baptism to the Gentiles converting to Judaism, he called upon Jews to be baptized.⁷

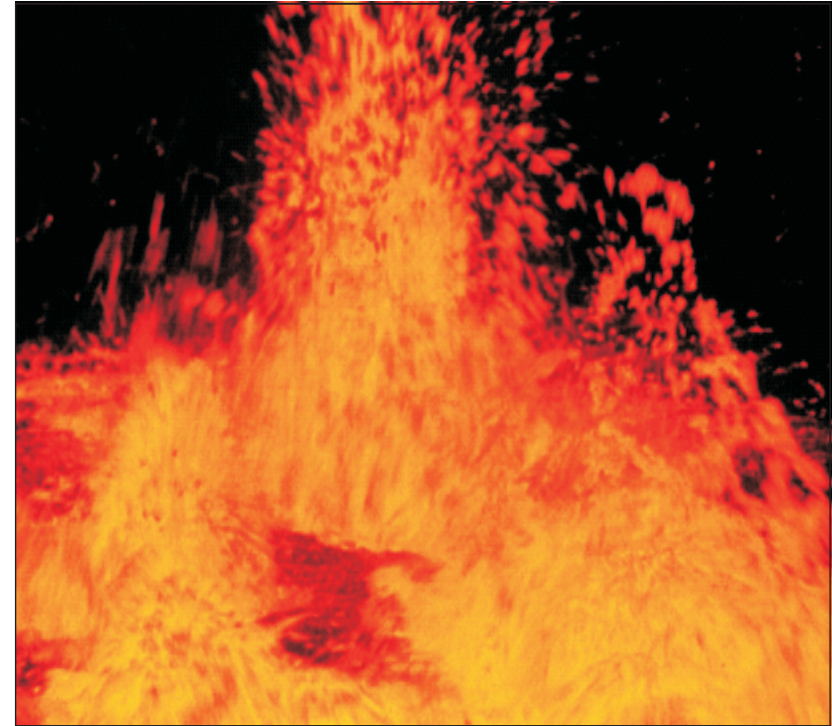
As John began his preaching of repentance, all roads leading to Jordan were crowded with people going to listen to him, and to be baptized. Jesus equally closed His carpenter shop and made His way to Jordan to be baptized.⁸

The Meaning of Jesus' Baptism

Ellen White comments that “when Jesus came to be baptized, John recognized in Him a purity of character that he had never before perceived in any man”.⁹ John was puzzled, “how could he, a sinner, baptize the Sinless One? And why should He who needed no repentance submit to a rite that was a confession of guilt to be washed away?”¹⁰ With firm yet gentle authority, Jesus answered, ‘suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. John yielded, and Jesus stepped into the Jordan River. Identifying Himself with sinners, Jesus set the example for all who would follow Him.¹¹

“Christ's submission to baptism by John was the seal that confirmed John's ministry and placed Heaven's stamp of approval upon it”. Jesus' baptism was the crowning act of John's ministry.¹² In addition to identifying with the ministry of John, Jesus' baptism declares the nature of His mission. He would be a crucified, buried, and resurrected Messiah.

Additionally, the event provided one of the most important declarations of the Trinitarian nature of God with the baptism of the Son, the voice of the Father, and the descent of the Spirit in the form of a dove (Matt.3:16-17).¹³



Jesus' baptism also served as His anointing.¹⁴ This is in line with the time-prophecy given by Daniel (Daniel 9:23-27).

“Seventy weeks (of years, or 49 years) are decreed upon your people and upon your holy city, Jerusalem....Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until (the coming of) the Anointed One, a Prince, shall be seven weeks (of years) and sixty-two weeks (of years)....And after the sixty-two weeks (of years) shall the Anointed One be cut off or killed. ...And He shall enter into

a strong and firm covenant with the many for one week (seven years); and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and offering to cease". (The Amplified Bible).

Seventy prophetic weeks represent 490 years. The time period begins at the time of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem. There were three of these issued by Persian kings but the final and complete decree was issued in the autumn of 457BC.¹⁵

Sixty-nine of the seventy prophetic weeks (483 years) reached to Messiah (the Anointed One). Beginning at 457 BC, 483 years leads to AD 27 – the very year of Jesus' baptism and anointing with the Holy Spirit. Luke carefully records Jesus' baptism as having taken place in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius (Luke 3:1, 2).¹⁶

In the middle of the last, or seventieth week, Messiah was to be 'cut off'. The ministry of Jesus was limited to three-and-a-half years from His baptism in the autumn of AD 27 to the Spring of AD 31 when He was crucified.¹⁷ For the remaining three-and-a-half years allotted to confirm the covenant with Israel, Jesus' followers continued His ministry until the stoning of Stephen in AD 34. The Gospel was taken to the Gentiles from that time.¹⁸

The above explanation is diagrammatically shown below:

THE SEVENTY WEEKS PROPHECY OF DANIEL 9:23-27

(This chart is adapted from David Marshall, *God's Good News*, p. 156).

457 BC	ORDER TO REBUILD JERUSALEM	SEVEN
408 BC	JERUSALEM REBUILD	
		SIXTY TWO WEEKS 434 YEARS
AD 27	MESSIAH ANOINTED	ONE WEEK 7 YEARS
AD 31	JERUSALEM REBUILD	
AD 31	GOSPEL TO GENTILES	

Significant events at Jesus' baptism

Matthew 3:16, 17 states that as soon as Jesus was baptized, He "came up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon

Him. And suddenly, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'".

The following can be deduced from the above text:

1. **Jesus was immersed in water** – Jesus did not receive baptism as a confession of guilt on His own account but He identified Himself with sinners, taking the steps that sinners are to take.¹⁹
2. **A voice out of heaven was heard** (Matt. 3:17; Luke 3:21-22). These words of confirmation were given to inspire faith in those who witnessed the scene, and to strengthen the Saviour for His mission.²⁰
3. **The descent of the Holy Spirit** – "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him". (Acts 10:38). At Jesus' baptism, He received a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, signifying His anointing or dedication to the mission His Father had assigned Him (Matthew 3:13-17). Water baptism and Spirit baptism belong together – a baptism void of the reception of the Holy Spirit is incomplete.²¹

Mode of Baptism

Evidence from the paintings in catacombs and churches, from the mosaics on floors, walls, and ceilings, from sculptured reliefs, and from drawings in ancient New Testaments testifies to immersion as the normal mode of baptism in the Christian church during the first ten to fourteen centuries.²² Further, "baptisteries in the ancient

cathedrals, churches, and ruins in North Africa, Turkey, Italy, France, and elsewhere still testify to the antiquity of this practice".²³

It is worthy of note that baptism's meaning is intimately related to its mode. When a baptismal candidate repents and confesses his sins, he is placed under water – a symbol of the death and burial of the old life of self and sin. Then he is raised up out of the watery grave to a new life in Christ, symbolizing the resurrection of our Lord.²⁴

Only immersion adequately pictures a burial and a resurrection (Rom.6:4-6)²⁵ It is clear that pouring and sprinkling are not symbols of death and burial. This Paul makes clear that coming forth from baptism symbolizes being "raised up from the dead". (Rom.6:4-6)²⁶

Difference between John's Baptism and Jesus' Baptism (Today's Baptism)

The baptism of John pointed forward to Christ (Matt. 3:11). It stressed the necessity of repentance. And it was intended for the Jews only.²⁷

Today's baptism (i.e. Jesus' baptism) symbolizes repentance, cleansing from sin, acceptance of Christ as the Saviour in preparation for the second coming of Christ. It involves the impartation of the Holy Spirit to the believer (Matt. 3:11; John 1:33).

Also, the sinners who are "baptized in the threefold name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, at the very entrance of their Christian life declare publicly that they

have forsaken the service of Satan and have become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King.²⁸ Besides, today's baptism symbolizes believer's entrance or admission into the church. On the day of Pentecost, those who believed and were baptized were added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47).

Prerequisites to Baptism

1. **Faith** – One prerequisite for baptism is a faith in Jesus' atoning sacrifice as the only means of salvation from sin. Christ said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved..." (Mark 16:16). Only those who believed the gospel were baptized in the apostolic church (Acts 8:12, 36, 37; 18:8).²⁹ There is no saving power in the rite of baptism itself, apart from faith in the heart of the one receiving it.³⁰
2. **Instruction**: Jesus told His disciples that before baptism comes instruction. The sacred rite of baptism is not something to be entered into lightly but comes after a person has become acquainted with God's truths in the Bible (Matt 28:18-20). However, more than a mere knowledge of doctrine is needed. There must be a commitment of one's whole life to Christ.³¹
3. **Repentance** – Instruction in the word of God produces faith (Rom. 10:17) and also repentance and conversion. Only through repentance can the sinners experience death to sin.³²

These prerequisites to baptism suggest that infant baptism is a meaningless procedure so far as the salvation of the child is concerned.³³ Only one sufficiently mature to have recognized, confessed and repented of his sin, and made a conscious commitment of faith in Christ should be baptized (Acts 2:41).

Conclusion

Jesus is our perfect example and standard. His baptism is an example to everyone who wants to be saved. If Christ, a sinless and Perfect being could be baptized, how much more the need for sinful and imperfect beings?

To reinforce its necessity, Christ says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). It is a step that is sine qua non to our salvation. Jesus laid this example. Three thousand people followed Christ's example on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Ethiopian eunuch understood its importance and was baptized without procrastination (Acts 8:36-39). Cornelius and his household believed and were all baptized (Acts 10:47, 48). Many others in the Bible followed the Master's example and were baptized. This is a necessary rite for "...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

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CHAPTER SIX

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

Efe M. Ehioghae

Temptation has a pervading presence; it cannot be wished away.¹ We encounter it everywhere, lurking at every corner of human habitation to take advantage of the unwary. We are tempted by what we see, what we hear and not infrequently by what we feel. Much more, we are tempted by our lustful desires. Apostle James was very clear on this. He says, “each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed” (James 2: 14).

Charles H. Spurgeon, a celebrated preacher of the 19th century, probably reflected on James 2 when he wrote: “Beware of no man more than yourself; we carry our worst enemies within us.”² Temptation is, however, not synonymous with sin.³ After all, Jesus was tempted. Matthew, Mark and Luke, the three synoptic gospel writers, recorded the event (See Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1-13). Commenting on the nature of temptation, Buttrick described it as a “chance to rise as much as a it is a chance to fall...for men and steel are alike uncertain until they are tested.”⁴ It is the goal of this chapter to examine the temptation of Christ while drawing some lessons that

would be useful to believers, today, who are faced with similar temptations.

A Puzzling Narrative

Have you ever wondered how the story of the temptation of Christ got into the account of the gospel writers? Remember Jesus was alone when the Devil came to him to tempt him. Both Matthew and Luke gave a vivid account of what really happened (Matt. 4:1-11; cf. Luke 4:1-13). Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit immediately after his baptism, to meditate and pray. Indeed the records reveal that he had been fasting for forty days and nights before the Devil suddenly showed up. The encounter was unique because neither the disciples of Jesus nor any other human witness was present to observe the spiritual battle of wits. The adversary marshaled all his weapons in the arsenal of deceptions and subterfuge to take advantage of the Savior but to no avail. Jesus came out of the duel victorious. Two possibilities may account for how the story got to us.

One possibility is that Jesus himself told his disciples the story so that it might be recorded for posterity. Perhaps Jesus wanted us to learn some lessons from the encounter so that we can overcome, when we are tempted, just the same way he overcame.

The second possibility is that the Gospel writers were inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit to document it. The prophets of old wrote down much of what they penned even though they did not personally experience them; human agencies can probe divine mysteries when inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). A very clear

example is the account of creation documented by Moses (see Gen. 1 and 2). Certainly, Moses was not there when God began to create. He was inspired to write down the account.

A pertinent point to note why the temptation of Jesus is recorded in the Holy Writ is to demonstrate that nobody is above temptation. If Jesus was tempted who else is immune to the subtle and seductive influences of the adversary?

FIRST TEMPTATION: APPETITE

Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights and he must have been very hungry. It was at the point when Jesus was famished for lack of food that the Devil chose to strike. He does this very often; he takes advantage of us at the point of our greatest weakness.⁵ Try to visualize for a moment the scenario: Jesus has been without food for such a long period of time and he looks emaciated and perhaps struggles with fainting spells. Satan comes along panoplied like an angel of God on a mission to help. The adversary grins at the caricature we make of him when he is painted like a monster with a long tale. It serves his purpose better to be depicted like that because such representations of the Devil effectively mask his true nature. Apostle Paul warns us not to be taken in by such naïve concepts of the arch-deceiver. He writes: "And no marvel, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Cor.11:14, KJV). Satan appeared to Jesus in the wilderness as an angel of light. He has not changed; he often adopts the same strategy today to deceive souls who are not on guard.

Sowing Seeds of Doubt

As we consider this encounter of the Devil with Christ it is important to point out something that is quite revealing about the first statement that the deceiver made. He said: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Matt.4: 3; cf. Luke 4: 3, NIV). Do you identify an insinuation of doubt? Doubt dampens the certainty of God's word and diminishes the conviction of faith.⁶ The Devil was in essence saying to Christ: Are you sure you are the Son of God? If you think you are, prove it by turning the stones strewn all over the place to bread! A very subtle deception. This first temptation was to put to the test Christ's consciousness of his divine "Sonship".⁷ Jesus had the power to turn those stones to bread. He did very many miracles later, including turning water to wine (John 4: 1-10). But Jesus would not attend to his personal needs at the prompting of the adversary. It was a bait Satan threw at Christ, hoping that he would swallow it when he said, "If you are the Son of God..." Jesus was indeed the Son of God but by obeying the suggestion of the Devil would only demonstrate that He doubted His Sonship. Not too long before that incident, His heavenly had divinely confirmed His Sonship (Luke 3:22).⁸ Jesus knew He was the Son of God and He didn't need to prove it to the adversary

Bread is not Enough

Unfortunately, Eve's encounter with the Devil in the garden of Eden left Eve totally defeated and spiritually damaged. The adversary had also sown a seed of doubt, when he said, "Has God indeed said..." (Gen.3:1)? What is quite surprising in the case of Eve, unlike Christ's, is that

she was neither hungry nor fasting when she was tempted on appetite. It only shows that temptations become very over-mastery when we deviate, in the slightest degree, from the expressed commands of God. Jesus overcame by using the words of God as a weapon of defense and offense. He answered the adversary by saying: "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matt. 4: 4, NIV).

The appetite is powerful. Remember Esau who sold his birthright for a pot of porridge (Gen.25: 34). But we need to realize that we do not live to pander the flesh, no matter how great the yearnings.⁹ We can overcome when we ask for the Holy Spirit's empowerment. We pander to the flesh in many ways today. Some do that by eating indiscriminately; others take to smoking cigarette or drugs or otherwise give themselves to a reprobate life through sexual promiscuity. When we are not able to control the yearnings of the flesh, the Devil can easily take advantage of us. We become slaves to appetite.

A Three-Pronged Attack

Specifically, one may understand the temptation of Christ as a three-pronged attack on the Savior by the evil one.

Arrogance to show off: The temptation to show off is always there. We all have the predilection to want to prove to the world that we have some power, especially if we are challenged. Nobody wants to be seen as nobody. Jesus exuded the power of the Holy Spirit immediately after he was baptized and he knew that such power resided in him.

He declared sometime later that he has the power to lay down his life and then to take it (John 10:18). He had the resurrection power that can also raise each of us from the grave (John 11:25). But he was not going to use such powers in a manner to show off or to prove a point to the Devil. In fact, to try to use that power to prove that he has it is an indirect way of confessing doubt. The prodding to show off was an attack on Christ; the Savior avoided the snare.

Short-cut to prevent sacrifice: The human nature abhors sacrifice or hardship. If there is a way to avoid it we would avoid it. Satan attacked Jesus here, also, hoping to overcome him on this natural tendency to seek pleasure rather than pain. The mission that Jesus came to the wilderness to contemplate lay ahead of him. To accomplish it would entail a great deal of sacrifice; he would eventually pay the ultimate price for it. He would be crucified and be subjected to a most gruesome death at the hands of the haters of God. Satan made it appear to Jesus that he would certainly die of starvation in the wilderness if he failed to do something immediately about his pitiable plight. Who wouldn't want to prevent a present danger or avoid it, especially when he has the power to do it? Sometimes Satan paints a picture on our minds of instant or imminent death in the course of trying to obey God. He makes it appear that the only way to preserve life is when we disobey divine mandates. All of this is a bait. We cannot really preserve our lives except God preserves them for us (James 4:14). This is not to say that we should live recklessly. If we are carrying out the will of God, nobody or circumstance can cut short our lives except with God's permission.

Jesus was in the wilderness, led by the Holy Spirit. He may starve because of the fasting but he had the assurance that God would preserve his life. As pointed out by Wenin, by adhering to his Father's will, Jesus' fidelity "shone through, fidelity to himself, to his Father, to his mission, a fidelity from which he never deviated (Matt. 16:16-23), not even in the face of death (Matt. 26:36-44).¹⁰

Cheap way to get followers: For many, today, the "health and wealth" gospel is working.¹¹ The focus is on meeting the physical or material needs of the suffering masses. The world is a lazar house of suffering; so many are dying of hunger. Meeting the physical needs of people is a component of the gospel. After all Jesus fed the hungry and healed the sick (Matt.14: 20; Mark 8:8; Luke 6:19, 9:17). But that is not the heart of the gospel; it is healing people of their spiritual maladies. And to do that, Jesus had to lay down his life for us all (John15:13). If Jesus had performed a miracle to meet his own personal physical needs precipitated by hunger why not perform a miracle to feed all the masses of the poor during the course of his ministry? If all that Jesus came to do was to supply our material needs, the human predicament would remain unaltered. The soul malady is first spiritual before it manifested in the physical. A social gospel is at best cosmetic; it does not penetrate to meet the innermost needs of the soul.

Jesus rejected the suggestion of the adversary because the purpose of his coming to this world was not to win the love of men through the supply of material needs. He came to save them from their sins (Luke 9:56,19:10; John 3:17). Thus when Jesus said to the Devil: "Man shall not live

by bread alone..." the words he spoke acquired a new meaning. We need more than bread to truly live; we need Jesus, the living word of God to bring life back to out palsied souls. We need the word of God to live, Jesus once said to his disciples, "The word I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63).

SECOND TEMPTATION: PRESUMPTION

What is presumption? It simply means expecting God to do what he has not promised. Of course, there are numerous promises in the Bible. As God's children we have the privilege to claim them to meet specific needs. The promises are however premised on certain conditions. If you ignore the conditions it becomes presumption. There is a thin line of difference between faith and presumption. While faith is acting on God's promises; presumption is acting, regardless. Acting presumptuously is fraught with dangers.

Scriptures Wrongly Applied

The Devil wanted Jesus to act presumptuously. He had taken the Savior to the tower or pinnacle of the temple. He tried to cajole Christ to jump down from the height as a way of dramatically announcing the commencement of his ministry. Did the inspired prophecy not indicate that the Messiah would dramatically appear in the temple (Mal.3:1). Would it not appear to be a fulfillment of the prophecy if Jesus jumped down from the temple to announce his presence? Also the Mishnah (i.e. Jewish) states that the Messiah would jump down from the pinnacle of the temple during a feast in the presence of the people. The Devil seems to be saying to Jesus here: "You are

the Messiah. Prove it by fulfilling these prophecies!”

What made the temptation very strong and convincing was when Satan began to quote the Scriptures. He recited a portion of Psalm 91:11,12:

He will command his angels
concerning you,
and they will lift you up
in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot
against a stone.

Who says the Devil does not know the Scriptures? He sure knows but only uses it to his own advantage and to deceive. He tried to do that in his encounter with Christ. It would be instructive to see how this promise was originally rendered in Psalm 91.

For he will command his angels
concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;
they will lift you in their hands,
so that you will not strike
your foot against a stone (NIV, italics added).

Observe that Satan omitted a section of the pericope in order to carry out his deceptive agenda. The italicized section was omitted by the arch-deceiver and that for a reason. If we allow the angels of God to guard us in all our ways we will not walk presumptuously. But that was exactly the plan of the Devil; he wanted Jesus to act presumptuously by applying the promise of protection in Psalm 91 out of context. He does the same thing with us today by prompting us to act, presumptuously. He could

cite one or two sacred texts to lend a biblical support to his suggestions. But always, they are either quoted out of context or used without applying the conditions for their fulfillment.

The Imperative of Bible Study

The children of God need to beware of Satan's tricks and be equipped to unmask his specious suggestions. They cannot do this except they themselves know the Scriptures and how to apply them appropriately. If ever there was a time God's people need to take seriously the counsel of Paul to Timothy, his spiritual protégé, it is now. Paul admonishes Timothy to “Study to show yourself approved...” (2 Tim.2:15, NKJV). This counsel is not just for church workers or ministers but it is equally profitable for every believer.

Today, the Devil is more crafty in his ways, ever devising means to mislead if possible the very elect. Our only safety is to know the will of God as we study the Bible and be vitally connected to Christ. The Bible is perhaps more neglected today than some decades ago. So many depend on what their spiritual leaders tell them without bothering to study the word of God by themselves. We expose ourselves to deception when we do this. Indeed we should be like the Bereans who, having listened to the revered Apostle Paul preached to them would go back home and do their own personal Bible study (Acts 17:10,11).

It is significant to note how Jesus responded to Satan's suggestion to jump down from the pinnacle of the temple. Again, Jesus cited the Scriptures to rebuff the deceiver. He says, “You shall not tempt the Lord thy God”

(Deut. 6:16). By jumping down as Satan suggested would tantamount to tempting God. Even though God promised deliverance to his people, it does not mean we should deliberately do things just to prove if God would act according to his promises. Jesus did not need to jump down from the pinnacle just to demonstrate whether the promise of protection is real. Jumping down is akin to a kind of abracadabra or stunt that magicians perform. The promises of God are not to be applied indiscriminately, lest our actions become presumptuous. We should be sufficiently acquainted with the word of God to be able to differentiate between acting by faith as we claim the promises and acting presumptuously.

THIRD TEMPTATION: COMPROMISE

One enemy of faith is compromise. It undermines the gospel, devalues its power to effect positive transformations. A word picture of compromise is presented in the book of Revelation. In one of Apostle John's letters, addressed to the Laodicean believers in Asia Minor, he writes: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot" (Rev. 3:15, KJV). God abhors a compromising stance; a tepid believer is a lame duck for the Devil. The adversary wanted Jesus to compromise on a very important point: who to worship. The deception began in heaven. Satan would want to be worshiped as God; he succeeded in deceiving a third of the heavenly angels (Rev.12:4).

Who Deserves your Allegiance?

The sacred record says that Jesus was taken by the adversary to a very high mountain where, like a panorama,

he was shown all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. The allure and glamour of riches and materialism were presented before Christ. The adversary suggested to Christ: "All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:9). It was the height of insolence for Satan to have suggested that to Christ. The creature expecting the creator to worship him! Paul was definite when he declared that in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col.1:9; 2:9). He is the creator. Without him nothing was made that was made (John 1:1-3). But Satan thought he could overcome the Savior if he is subjected to the seductive powers of materialism. Jesus knew it was time to abandon the dialogue with the adversary. He issued a peremptory command: "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only you shall serve'" (Matt 4:10, NKJV).

The Lure of Materialism

The god of many today is materialism. They worship at the shrine of cupidity. They can easily batter away their eternal salvation with the comforts of life. For some, the promise of position and fame is enough to sell the truth in exchange. They feel free to parley with the Devil and make covenant with him. But the Bible says, "Buy the truth and sell it not..." (Prov.23:23). Certain things are too precious to bargain with. Jesus reveals the utter foolishness in allowing material things to blanket our view of eternal realities. He says, "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" (Matt 16:26, NAS). Absolutely nothing! What is to be compared to the heavenly riches that shall be the possession of the redeemed?

A close look at this third temptation (which was placed second by Luke) shows that Satan tried to cajole Christ to “yield up the real kingship of the world and become subject to him.”¹² The prospect was dangled before the Savior to be a political Messiah. By accepting the bargain Jesus would have been a great political leader, and nothing more. Of what eternal benefit will such a leader be to resolving the problem of sin and a world on the path of self-destruct? But as rightly pointed out by Carnegie Simpson “Instinctively, we do not class him with others...Jesus is not one of the group of the world's great. Talk about Alexander the Great and Charles the Great and Napoleon the Great if you will... Jesus is apart. He is not the Great; he is the Only...”¹³

Why Jesus Rejected the Offer

It is instructive to point out why Jesus rejected the offer:

- (a) In the first place, to acknowledge the devil's power in any area of life amounts to denial of God's ultimate authority. Jesus' commitment was exclusively to God as Sovereign and Lord.
- (b) Secondly, Jesus knew that God's rule is established in the hearts of men through love and free, willing obedience to God, not imposed from outside like that of the world's kingdoms.
- (c) Thirdly, it is God alone who deserves and is worthy of worship (Rev.4: 11; Exodus. 20 8-11). Jesus rejected the compromise and defeated the devil with the word of God: “Away from me, Satan, for it is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only” (see Deut. 6: 13).

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF SALIENT POINTS

Luke made an insightful comment when he wrote: “And the devil left Him, but for a season” (Luke 4: 13). This shows that the Devil did not relent in his temptations of Christ. He only left for a while but only to come back. But Christ always defeated him because he depended on his Father for strength and the word of God as a guide. Temptations will indeed come one way or the other; how we respond to them makes all the difference. We emerge stronger from tempting situations when we respond appropriately by allowing the word of God to serve as a basis for defense. In a nutshell, temptations need to be fought, at every turn, with Scripture, prayer and determination.¹⁴

It is pertinent to note the following points as God's children:

- i) We can emerge victorious when faced with tempting situations if we depend on the wisdom of God as enshrined in the Bible. In our encounter with the Devil human wisdom is ineffective to disarm him. Jesus “took the nature of man with the possibility of yielding to temptation.”¹⁵ But he did not commit sin because he was fully yielded to his Father's will.
- ii) We do not commit sin when we are tempted. It is yielding to temptation that constitutes sin. Christ was tempted several times but he remained steadfast in the path of righteousness. Oftentimes, the Devil tempts us using human beings as a decoy, just as he did in the case of Christ (Matt.16:22, 23; 2:40).

- iii) Through the use of the word of God as a tool, the believer can overcome temptations. Christ allowed the inspired Scriptures to guard him in every aspect of his conduct. We need to be familiar with the word of God. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Eph.6:17). We can use it as a weapon against the adversary.
- iv) Christians may resist temptation and force Satan to depart from them (Jam. 4: 7, 8; Prov. 18: 10). Apostle James admonishes us to “resist the Devil and he will flee...” (James 4:7). We should not yield each time we are tempted. We can overcome in Christ because he overcame. We need to note that “Satan trembles and flees before the weakest soul who finds refuge in that mighty name of Jesus.”¹⁶
- v) We have the assurance that we can also overcome because Jesus overcame temptation and the Devil. Christ is able to help and save those that are tempted (Heb. 2: 18; 4: 15; 1. 1 Peter 2: 22). Therefore we can have the confidence that the salvation of all believers in Christ is sure or assured.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM (THE KINGDOM OF GOD)

Theodore U. Dickson

The concept of the Kingdom of God is, in a certain important sense, the grand central theme of the Holy Scriptures.¹ The Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) constitute the primary sources for our information concerning the kingdom of God. The OT concept of the kingdom of God relates directly to God's sovereignty throughout all the ages.² From the creation (Gen. 1 – 2) to the Fall (Gen. 3), and throughout biblical history (Gen. 6 – 9, 11; Exod. 3 – 16, etc.), evidences abound of a sovereign God who is in charge and controls all (both the world and His creatures). God began His kingdom program at creation, long before the establishment of an earthly messianic kingdom.³

The NT presents an overwhelming idea that the “kingdom of God/heaven” refers to the promised Davidic Messianic Kingdom centrally based in the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12, 15), the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7; Pss 2, 110) as well as its spiritual requirements necessary for its realization in the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-33; Ezek

36:25-27; cp. John 3:1-6).⁴ Despite the OT basis for the Kingdom of God, the NT, through the teachings and works of Jesus Christ, is rich with evidences of not only its formal inauguration on earth but also its growth and the hope of final consummation at the Second Coming of Christ (Matt. 5 – 7; cf. Lk. 6:17 – 49; Mat. 12:29; cf. Mk. 3:27; Lk. 11:21 – 22). Ayegboyin asserts that the kingdom of Heaven/God is a term of central importance in the Synoptic tradition because it constitutes the central theme of the teachings of Jesus Christ⁵ thus: 15 times in Mark; 39 times in Luke, and 46 times in Matthew.⁶

This chapter therefore examines the concept and meaning of the Kingdom of God with emphasis on Jewish understanding. It further explores Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom of God which unfolds its phases of manifestation. The nature of the Kingdom of God is contrasted within the ambit of Jewish and Jesus' thoughts. Then the study evaluated scholars' views of the concept of the Kingdom of God. Prior to the conclusion, the principles for entrance into God's Kingdom, both at present and in the future, are presented.

The Concept and Meaning of the Kingdom of God

A brief survey of the Hebrew root *mlk* reveals the distribution of the concept of kingship and kingdom throughout the OT. Forms of this root occur 3,154 times in the Hebrew Bible. The meaning of the *Qal* (over two hundred times) is always “to reign,” that is, to be and exercise functions of a monarch, whether male (king) or female (queen). The vast majority of uses involve human kings and kingdoms.⁷ This word, by no means, comprises the totality of usages or references on the concept of kingship, kingdom, or royalty in the OT.

In the NT, the word 'kingdom' is one of the translations of the Greek *basileia*, which means “reign,” “rule,” and “territory.” Consequently, Akpa observes that the concept of a kingdom implies a king who has a territory, subjects, sovereignty, power and authority to not only rule but also protect his subjects.⁸ Suffice it to say that there is the understanding that a kingdom possesses five essential elements: first, a *right to rule (Kingship)*; second, a *rule (Sovereignty)*; third, a *realm (territory)* to be ruled; fourth, *subjects (humans)*; and, fifth, the exercise of the function of *rulership (power and authority)*.⁹ These defining elements help to maintain an understanding of biblical teaching beyond a mere reference to the right of kingship or limiting it to the person of the King himself.

Therefore, the basic meaning of the Kingdom of God in the OT is that of the “Kingly rule,” “reign,” or “sovereignty of God.” God's sovereignty over all things affirms that He is the King of the universe, whose reign is eternal.¹⁰ His kingdom embraces the whole of reality. One will then ask: what exactly is the Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of God? How did the Jews perceive it? Ayegboyin is right when he observed that the expression “Kingdom of God” is deeply rooted in the thoughts of the OT.¹¹ Therefore, it is necessary to examine what it meant to the Jews before and during the lifetime of Jesus.

Old Testament Understanding of the Kingdom of God

The idea of the kingdom of God did not begin with Jesus. In the OT, the book of Daniel is rich with kingdom matters. In Daniel 2:44, the young prophet explains to the monarch the image of gold, silver, iron and clay, which, in his dream, he had seen shattered by “a stone cut out without hands.” His interpretation shows that various

aspects of this image represented a succession of world-kingsdoms destined to be destroyed by "a kingdom of God," which shall last forever.¹² Again, in Daniel's famous vision of the "Son of Man" (Dan. 7:14): "There was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." In the above text, the Kingdom of God is such that will have a sovereign King, whose dominion and glory will endure forever. His reign will be universal and His Kingdom shall never be destroyed. This description of the Kingdom and its King, and His rulership is undeniably of divine origin.¹³ These passages in Daniel form, undoubtedly, the proximate source of the phrase; yet the idea which it represents mounts far higher.

From the first, the Jewish state was governed by laws believed to be derived directly from heaven. This accounts for the disappointment and stern reproach from both God and Samuel, when the people demanded a king that they might be like other nations (1 Sam. 8:1 – 9). Such request amounted to an outright rejection of God Himself, their Sovereign King, whose power, authority and leadership they had enjoyed from the Exodus to the conquering of the Canaanite city states. With this sublime conception, the actual monarchy was only a compromise, the reigning monarch passing for Yahweh's representative on earth.¹⁴ In other words, the Jews still regarded God as pre-eminently the true King of Israel. Consequently, King Saul and those who reigned after him merely ruled Israel on God's behalf. In this respect, Israel was the Kingdom of Yahweh (1 Chron. 17:14; Exod. 19:6). Even when the political kingdom perished and the people were carried

away into Babylon, the intelligent and truly religious among them did not cease to cherish the old hope as they sighed and prayed that Yahweh might take to Himself His great power and reign; or that the prophets predicted the coming of a ruler who would be far nearer to God than the actual kings, whose reign there would be no end..

The restoration of the kingdom after Israel's exile was a major expectation of the prophets of old (see Isa. 1:26; 9:7; Jer. 16:14 – 15; 23:5 – 8; 33:14 – 18; 50:19; Hos. 3:4 – 5; 11:11; Amos 9:11 – 12; Zech. 9:9 – 10). Expectedly, the return from Babylon seemed a miraculous confirmation of their faith, and it appeared as if the day they prayed and longed for was about to dawn. Regrettably, it proved a day of small things (Ezra 3:11 – 13; Hag. 1:1 – 6). Moreover, the very aspect of the world powers (Babylon, Medo-Persia and later Greece), and the subsequent Roman menace, only widened their conceptions of what that kingdom must be which could overcome them all. The era of the Maccabees was only a transitory.¹⁵

Given the above milieu, the Jews were compelled to look forward to the 'new era' when God, through the agency of the Messiah from David's line (2 Sam. 7), would break in on the domain of Satan and his allied tyrants, save His people from their enemies, and inaugurate His Kingdom (that is, as far as they were concerned, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth) in its fullness. It was hoped that it would be a Jewish Kingdom with Mount Zion or Jerusalem as its center.¹⁶ This atmosphere where the Messianic hopes flourished and Messianic language filled the mouths of the people was the one Jesus met. And during His ministry, this secularized understanding and expectation was evident in the request of James and John for positions in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 20:20 – 21), and

His disciples' question on when He will establish His (earthly) Kingdom after His resurrection (Acts 1:6).

The Kingdom of God in the Teachings of Jesus

When John the Baptist began his ministry, he announced the nearness of the Kingdom of God, which he associated with the coming of the Messiah for whom he was a forerunner. John told his adherents that repentance is the qualification into this New Kingdom (Matt. 3: 1, 2).¹⁷ Akpa notes that it was at this same setting that Jesus, upon the inauguration of the kingdom of God, gave the messages that constitute the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5 – 7:27).¹⁸ After the death of John the Baptist, Jesus came to Galilee preaching about the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). In addressing His audience, Jesus taught about the Kingdom in several ways some of which include.

1. The Kingdom is at hand and repentance is a condition for entrance (Mat. 3:2; 4:17).
2. The Kingdom is a realm in which God's reign may be experienced (Matt. 6:10).
3. The Kingdom is a present reality (Matt. 12:28), and yet it is a future blessing (I Cor. 15:50).
4. The Kingdom is a realm into which men and women enter now (Matt. 21:31), and yet it is a realm into which they will enter tomorrow (Matt. 8:11).
5. The Kingdom of God is at the same time a gift of God which will be bestowed by God in the future (Luke 12:32) and yet which must be received in the present (Mark 10:15).
6. The Kingdom of God is an inner spiritual redemptive blessing (Rom. 14:17) which can be experienced only by way of the new birth (John 3:3), and yet it will have

to do with the government of the nations of the world which will be transformed into the Kingdom of our God (Rev. 11:15).

7. The Kingdom of God offers both physical and spiritual deliverance and healing (Matt. 12:29; Lk. 11:20; Matt. 11:5; Lk. 7:22).
8. The Kingdom of God is not local but rather universal and available to all Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans alike (Mat. 8:8 – 12; Luke 13:28 – 29).

Of all His teachings, Jesus presented two major phases or stages of realization of the Kingdom of God thus: the present and the future Kingdoms.

The Present Kingdom (Realized Eschatology)

In different places, Jesus presented the Kingdom as a present realm, one that is already realized – otherwise referred to by scholars as Realized Eschatology.¹⁹ To douse every doubt as to whether the Kingdom was only “near” or actually had come, Jesus explicitly declared: “The Kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:21 NASB).²⁰ In essence, the presence of Jesus establishes the present kingdom of God. If the King has come, then the kingdom is present. Consequently, men and women could enter in here and now. Jesus demonstrated the fact that His coming ushered in the Kingdom of God in words and deeds.

First, in His sayings, the following Bible references are instructive:

- i. **Luke 16:16**, “The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently.”

- ii. **Matt. 21:31**, "The tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."
- iii. **Luke 11:52**, "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge: you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering."

Second, through His healing ministry, Jesus demonstrated that the power of God (as evident in His Kingdom) has overtaken Satan's rule as the demon possessed and those held captive were set free. Sinners were also forgiven.

- iv. **Matthew 12:28** "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." This was in response to those who accused Him of having the spirit of Beelzebub, the prince of devils.
- v. **Matthew 11:5** "*The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*" In His response to the question of John the Baptist on whether He was the expected One, Jesus demonstrated that the expected Messiah had come and that the Kingdom was already a living reality (see also Luke 7:22).
- vi. **Matthew 9:2** Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." Such forgiveness of sin was not placed in the future but there and then. By this,

Jesus re-established God's reign not only on earth in the physical sense, but in the hearts of men.²¹

This phase of the Kingdom of God which Jesus inaugurated through His presence and ministry is also called the **Kingdom of Grace**. It is here and now; men and women enter and can still enter. Jesus' public ministry brought about the reign or rule of God and defined its territory. This kingdom of God is present wherever a man or woman has made Christ the Lord of his/her life and accepted the rule of God in the heart. Upon His resurrection from the dead, Jesus handed the kingdom over to His disciples and commissioned them to preach the gospel of the Kingdom to the entire world (Matt.28:18 – 20; Mark 16:14 – 20; cf. John 13:1 – 17:23). By implication, beginning at Pentecost (Acts 2), the primary task of the true Church is to build the Kingdom of God. Jesus placed the responsibility not only on His disciples, but all who will come to Him through the power of the Gospel. Consequently, as the Church takes the Gospel into the entire world, it extends the Kingdom of God.

The Future Kingdom (Futuristic Eschatology)

Apart from the fact that God's Kingdom was established by the presence of Christ and His ministry, Jesus did not leave His audience in doubt concerning its futuristic nature. In other words, while the Kingdom of God is here and now, and men and women enter and can still enter, Jesus in His teachings demonstrated that the final consummation of this Kingdom is placed in the future, during His Second Coming. This is evident in the following references.

- i. **After healing the centurion's servant and commending his faith, He said:** "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (**Matt. 8:11**). Having healed **the centurion's** servant, Jesus commended his faith and proclaimed both universal and futuristic nature of His Kingdom.
- ii. To His disciples in the upper room, during the Lord's Supper, He said: "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (**Matt. 26:29**).
- iii. Virtually all the parables of crisis or judgment, namely: The Tares, the Talent, the Sheep and the Goats and the Thief at night may be understood to refer to the crisis or judgment which was to come in the future.

This future consummation of the Kingdom of God which takes place at the Second Coming of Christ is also referred to as the **Kingdom of Glory**.

Nature of the Kingdom of God - in Jewish and Jesus' Thoughts

So far, it is obvious the Jews held certain views about the nature of the Kingdom of God that are at variance with Jesus' teachings on the subject. These seeming converging and overly divergent views are presented in a tabular form thus:

S/NO	JEWISH VIEW OF THE KINGDOM	JESUS' VIEW OF THE KINGDOM
1.	A realm in which God's reign is experienced	A realm in which God's reign is experienced
2.	An earthly reality	Both earthly (present) and heavenly (future) reality
3.	Physical and political	Spiritual, but has physical dimension
4.	Confined to the frontiers of Israel and established in the city of David	Universal and available for Jews, Gentiles, and all who wish to come in – Mt. 8:11; Luke 2:32; 9:51 – 56;
5.	Brings political and material freedom	Brings physical and spiritual freedom
6.	Guarantees rest from their adversaries	Guarantees present and eternal rest
7.	Established through military might	Established through Divine Order – Dan 2:44; 7:14
8.	Citizens qualify by nationality	Citizens qualify by accepting Christ and expressing faith in His redeeming love
9.	Characterized by personal and national efforts, pride and self-righteousness	Characterized by love, obedience, humility, and goodwill
10.	Hope of restoration into a great nation	Empowerment to extend the Kingdom on earth in readiness for the final consummation when the saints will reign eternally with Christ.

Views on the Teachings of Christ on the Kingdom of God

Scholars hold some conflicting views on the manner in which the Kingdom of God will be consummated. First, C. H. Dodd conceives the Kingdom as the absolute, the "wholly other" and a present reality which has entered into time and space in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, rather than just a future hope.²² Second, Albert Schweitzer held that the Kingdom of God is an apocalyptic realm to be inaugurated by a supernatural act of God when history will be broken off and a new heavenly order of existence begun. The Kingdom of God in no sense of the word is a present or a spiritual reality; it is altogether future and supernatural.²³ The above views constitute the sharpest extremes and antithesis. Third, Adolf von Harnack reduced the

Kingdom of God to the subjective realm, which is to be understood in terms of the human spirit and its relationship to God. In other words, the Kingdom of God is an inward power which enters into the human soul and lays hold of it. It consists of a few basic religious truths of universal application.²⁵

Still others have understood the Kingdom of God to be essentially an ideal pattern for human society. The Kingdom is not primarily concerned with individual salvation or with the future but with the social problems of the present. Consequently, people build the Kingdom of God as they work for the ideal social order and endeavor to solve the problems of poverty, sickness, labor relations, social inequalities and race relationships.

Without doubt, each of the above views constituted a major or partial aspect of Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom of God. In Christ, the Kingdom of God is present, yet its final consummation is in the future. On the other hand, through the healing ministry of Christ, the Kingdom of God offers physical, material and spiritual blessings as it breaks Satan's stranglehold on the human soul. But these were not an end in themselves as the entrance of God's Kingdom brings inner spiritual redemptive blessing which comes through spiritual rebirth. Put together, the Gospel must not only offer a personal salvation in the future life to those who believe; it must also transform all of the relationships of life here and now and thus cause the Kingdom of God to prevail in all the world. The Gospel of redeeming grace has the power to save the social, economic and political orders as well as the souls of individual believers. The Kingdom of God is like a bit of leaven placed in a bowl of dough which slowly but steadily permeates

the dough until the entire lump is leavened. So is the Kingdom of God to transform the world by slow and gradual permeation.

Principles of God's Kingdom

Upon the inauguration of the Kingdom of God during the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus set forth the conditions and universal principles for qualification and entrance into His Kingdom. The news of His presence was heralded with great expectation among different classes of Jews. The Scribes and Pharisees looked forward to the day when they should have dominion over their enemies, the hated Romans, and possess the riches and splendor of the world's greatest empire. On the other hand, the poor peasants and fishermen hoped to hear the assurance that their wretched shacks, the scanty food, the life of toil, and fear of want, were to be exchanges for mansions and plenty and days of ease. Christ disappointed their hope of worldly greatness by undoing the false education and wrong perception of the Kingdom of God. Without combating their ideas of the Kingdom of God, He unveiled the conditions of or principles for entrance (Mat. 5 – 7:27; Luke 6:17 – 49). These principles could be summarized thus:

1. One must recognize his or her spiritual poverty and feel the need for redemption by being humble and possessing a contrite spirit, denouncing pride and self-righteousness.
2. One must be deeply sorry for his or her sins through genuine repentance, not pretence; being meek and lowly in heart, and possessing self-control.
3. One must possess a sense of unworthiness that, rid of self, but filled with unquenching thirst for the

truth, Jesus and His love. For the human soul is satisfied, not by food or wealth, but by feeding on the Word of God.

4. One must be merciful, not revengeful; forgiving others and not allowing impure thoughts or selfishness to obstruct the love of God, His goodness and truth in the hearts.
5. One must pursue peace with God and fellow humans. This peace is made possible only through obedience to the will of God (His Law), and the grace of God in Christ Jesus.
6. One must accept and obey the Law of God in its entirety as a sign of love for God and obedience to His will. For the righteousness Jesus taught is conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God, not in part but in whole.²⁶

Conclusion

The Kingdom of God is His sovereign reign; but God's reign expresses itself in different stages through redemptive history. Through His earthly ministry, Jesus established the present Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is a present reality which men and women enter now. However, its consummation remains in the future at the Second Coming of Christ. Against the localized and nationalistic view of the Jews, the Kingdom of God is universal and is open to both Jews and Gentiles. This Kingdom offers both physical and spiritual deliverance and an inner spiritual redemptive blessing experienced through new birth in Christ. This is the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Upon His resurrection from the

dead, Jesus handed the kingdom over to His disciples and commissioned them to preach the gospel of the Kingdom to the entire world. Consequently, the primary task of the true Church is to build the Kingdom of God.

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¹⁷Ayegboyin, 101

¹⁸Akpa, 2013, 15, 16

¹⁹Ayegboyin, 101

²⁰Robertson, 123. The phrase could also be read 'within you,' as in the NIV. But this alternative rendering of *entos hymon* also affirms the actual presence of the kingdom.

²¹Ayegboyin, 101

²²George E. Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. GR, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959, 13 – 23. Retrieved online from <http://gospelpedlar.com>, December 15, 2014. See also Ayegboyin, 103

²³Ladd, 1959, 13 – 23.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*. USA: Remnant Publication, Inc., 2000, 177 – 183

CHAPTER EIGHT

MISSION AND MINISTRY MODEL OF JESUS CHRIST

Adefemi S. Adesina

Clearly, Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of the Christian faith, mission and ministry, for this he is our true and primary model for mission and ministry. No doubt Jesus had a clear direction in terms of his mission and ministry and he sets the direction for our mission and ministry. In this chapter, we will take a look at the examples of Jesus' mission and ministry and glean from it, in order to set examples for Christian mission and ministry today.

No doubt Jesus was a man on mission, his whole resolve in life was to fulfill the mission given to him by his father, no matter how people try to get him to serve their agenda or define for him how to do his ministry he got stuck to his mission. And as the Bible shows, Jesus' primary purpose for mission and ministry is to create discipleship communities where radical faith in Jesus can be explored in a journey towards heaven, as the disciples seek to know God; in truth and the spirit. It is for this that his example will be paramount for the Christian mission of all ages.

The Missionary Methods of Jesus

The mission of Jesus was people based: As the Bible account shows us, Jesus' mission was focused on people and their felt need. His mission was not only people focused, it was also personal. For example he left the crowds to attend to the need of one man who had been driven to insanity by demonic spirits, a man who was naked, alone, and living among the dead. The man was a dangerous man, a man who was kept under guard of chains so that he didn't hurt himself or other people that may come his way. It was this man that Jesus went visiting to deliver him, so that he could also become an instrument of spiritual healing to others around the city. As Jesus healed the man, he sent him as a missionary to his own people rather than just taking him along as the thirteenth disciple.

Jesus' mission was cultural: Another lesson to learn from the mission approach of Jesus is that he was a cultural person. As David Bosch points out, "Jesus' Life and Ministry have to be seen within this concrete historical context. If not, we will not begin to understand him (Bosch, 26). Jesus was actually involved in every ordinary village life, he attended to Joseph's carpentry workshop, before He began his public ministry. No doubt his deep interaction made him to really know Judaism from inside out. One thing however was that where people's customs and tradition contradict the precept of God, Jesus became counter-cultural. For example, Jesus healed on the Sabbath, because to him, the Sabbath was made for the good of man. He also allowed his disciples to pluck and eat on the field on the Sabbath, contrary to what the custom of the Jews permitted (See Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6).

The mission of Jesus was contextual: In order for the mission of Jesus to be relevant, Jesus had a different message, for different people depending on their context and/or situation. He approached his encounter with demon possessed differently from his meeting with a tax collector like Levi or even with another rich man, Zacchaeus, or with a thief on the cross and with an executioner. We also are able to see in the experience of his disciples, for example we see in the Acts of the Apostles, differing approaches with the Jews and the Gentiles. To Jesus, though the message is constant, the application is contextual, for this, the Gospel speaks different words to different people at different times and even different words to different participants in the same times.

Jesus' mission was empowering and developmental: The mission and ministry of Jesus shows that he focused on empowerment and development of the human resources. Knowing that he did not have all the time and that he would not be able to fulfill his mission all alone, Jesus chose and taught the 12 apostles. Jesus called the 12 to give them power and authority to carry out the mandate (Mark 3:14-15). These disciples had about three years with him as he prepared them for mission. With him they engaged in what missionaries now call a mission tour. Through such tours, they familiarize themselves with the mission task, methods and strategy. By the time Jesus was gone, he left behind a group of identifiable disciples who have received the needed training, to carry on the mission. Beginning with the Sermon on the Mount, the gospel writer devote a major section of their works to describe how Jesus trained his disciples.

Jesus' mission was cross-cultural: As the Bible shows, Jesus engaged himself in several short term mission trips, Luke 8:1 tells us that Jesus went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve *were* with Him, in verse 22, haven gone from city to city and from village to village, he had a short-term mission trip across the Sea of Galilee. Here Jesus left this region to go to non-Jewish regions. On the Bible account we saw Jesus cross to "the other side of the lake" for the purpose of his mission. A kind of cross cultural mission. The Missionary Jesus makes it to the other side of the lake -in a gentile region referred to as the Gadarenes, which was opposite Galilee. Clearly, his efforts across the sea in a Gentile land was a cross cultural mission. The culture of the people differed from those of the Jews. For example, they had and kept pigs which was not customary to the Jews.

He was inter-religious in nature: While the work of Jesus was largely reformatory, restoratory, and transformational because most of his efforts were among the Jews, the cross cultural nature of his mission also made his mission inter-religious. Jesus worked among the pagans across the sea, a people who did not share the knowledge of the God of Israel with the Gentiles. There he shared the light of God's word with them, he went as light to them, as he took the gospel to a faraway land to people faraway to God. As Ephesians 2 says, he came and he preached to those who were near, and he came and he preached to those who were far off.

His mission was strategic: Another lesson from the mission practice of Jesus was that Jesus was not only effective, he

was strategic. Jesus had the master plan of His mission and he pursued it. Jesus knew he needed to establish his foothold among the Jews first, before he would go to regions outside of the Jewish society. The experience of the woman from Canaan who came all the way from her region to meet with Jesus aptly illustrates this, as she came asking for attention, Jesus showed that his priority at the time was to face his mission among the Jews by stating that he was sent for that purpose, though he later attended to her (Matt 15:24-26). Another incident that shows that Jesus was strategic in his mission and ministry was the story of the demonic that he healed. As the man begged that he might go with him, Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you (Luke 8:36-38)." Jesus knew at the point, he did not need the thirteenth disciple, so he rejected the offer for the man to follow him. Jesus rather sent him as a missionary back to his people. Knowing that he would be more effective with his people than he would among the Jews within whom his mission and ministry was based. The result was that the man went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him (Luke 8:38). It appeared that Jesus' whole plan was to get this one man healed, saved, and commissioned for ministry; that he might be sent back to his people. It was clear that Jesus had no intention of lingering long on the far side of the sea. His plan was a short-term mission trip, it was only to get special disciple who will lead his mission in the area, and he did that and left having fulfilled his strategic goal.

Jesus' mission was structural: Within the short time of his ministry, Jesus built a concentric mission structure upon which his ministry ran, and that gave pattern to how his

disciples carried out their mission even after he departed. Jesus had a series of concentric circle structures. He had the 12, most of whom were chosen from among the ordinary people, without wealth, high social position or academic background. Within the 12, he had the inner circle of Peter, James and John, who received special attention (Luke 8:51), he also had the circle of the wider 70 (Luke 10:1-20), then the 120 (Acts 1) and then the crowds of disciples who were distinct from the 12 (Luke 6:17). There were also the support women who accompanied the 12 in their ministry (Luke 8:2-3).

Jesus' mission was a way of life: To Jesus his mission was not just a garb that one wears at a time and pulls off at some other times. Jesus did not see his mission and ministry as a mere program or project, but as the reason for his being. We saw a Jesus who used every opportunity to engage his environment in mission wherever he went. Every opportunity he had in life became mission and ministry opportunity. As he fed people who were hungry, he taught them that he was the bread of life. To Jesus, the reason for his mission was to preach the gospel of salvation to his hearers, Jesus said, "Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons (Matthew 10:7-8). The lesson here is that whatever he did, he actually did for the sake of preaching the gospel.

Jesus' mission was value-based: An important lesson to learn from the missionary method of Jesus was that his mission and ministry was value based, we saw this in the Sermon on the Mount which he delivered to a large community of

his hearers in one of his few public mission appearances (Matt 5 and 6). His mission ultimately was decisive, and focused, it focused on characterbuilding that his disciples might become like him. His mission taught the listeners what to do and what not to do as God's people. The focus of his teachings was the kingdom values.

Jesus' mission and ministry was felt-need based: As Jesus encountered the people, he identified their needs, met their needs and then used that as basis for his message. As he encountered the blind, and helped them regain their sight, he talked about spiritual blindness of the people. As the Bible account goes, Jesus seldom went out for official preaching, except as his encounter threw him into the needed subjects. He met the woman at the well drawing water, only to offer her the water of life that will make her never to thirst again (John 4:1-26).

Jesus' mission was both eschatological and kingdom based: Though Jesus did not care less about the physical, social, emotional, psychological, as well as the material needs of those who came in contact with him, His mission was focused on eschatology – the time of the end, as well as the kingdom of God. As he welcomed more people to his community of faith, he spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing (Luke 9:1-2, 11). As he healed the sick who were there, he told them, "The kingdom of God is near" (Luke 10:9).

The notion of the reign of God is the central and recurring motif in Jesus' ministry. As the Bible shows Jesus' main concern was about establishing the kingdom of God on earth, where God will reign in the hearts of men and women. His experience and understanding of the

kingdom of God draws from the best insights of the Jewish tradition which understood God as king (Isaiah 52:17). Jesus brings a fresh approach to the notion of kingdom by linking it to his own experience of a deeply loving and caring God whose only concern is to liberate people from the forces of evil and to empower them with a new life-vision. Jesus' preaching emphasizes that it is only God's reign that is able to overturn evil and negativity in human life and history.

Jesus' mission was tutorial in nature: A major method that Jesus employed was to teach the word of God. He was not only a teacher he was also a prophet. All of the time his message was to teach his recipients the ways and the will of God. No wonder the most common term applied to Jesus in the gospels is that of 'teacher' or 'rabbi,' a term used at least thirty times in the gospels. He did not specialize in preaching to the people what they wanted to hear, but taught them what they needed to hear. Like John, Jesus teaches the importance of faith and repentance; he teaches compassion and love; like other Jewish teachers, he is inspired by profound respect for the Scriptures. As Bible indicates, Jesus, like other earlier teachers, developed specific style of ministry that was scripture based than other teachers of his day. This is evident in the way that he teaches fidelity to the Scriptures.

Though Jesus' teaching was radical, he did not see himself as starting a new religion. Jesus was neither a professional teacher nor an ordained scribe. Like them, he does teach in the synagogues; unlike them, he also teaches by the lakeside and in the open fields. He was distinctive in the way that he directed his teachings to all—including women, children, sinners, the sick—and not just to the

educated class or to a particular religious group. His message is not secretive or esoteric but is directed towards anybody 'who has ears to hear'. Moreover, Jesus differed from conventional teachers or rabbis by choosing his own disciples and drawing them into a relationship of friendship and mutuality.

As an effective leader Jesus used ordinary stories to lead and challenge listeners to a new experience in God. These stories he presented as parables were remarkable for their down-to-earth character and their ability to tap into people's everyday experiences. Take, for example, the parables of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke.18:9-14) and the Good Samaritan (Luke.10:29-37). Those parables clearly brought out the lessons that could cause attack on him if they were presented directly.

Jesus' ministry was authoritative: Jesus as a preacher and prophet spoke and acted with great personal authority. His authority surpassed the traditional role of the ethical prophets of Israel. Whereas the other prophets spoke in God's name by introducing their speech with the words like, 'Thus the Lord says . . .', Jesus spoke on his own authority as he said, 'I say to you . . .'. Jesus spoke with directness and immediacy that comes from the depths of the divine mystery, unlike the other prophets who were God's mouthpiece for a time. As Brennan Hill said, He could speak as a Pharisee, as an apocalyptic prophet, or as a wandering charismatic storyteller. At times he sounded like the Socratic teacher, challenging his students to ask new questions and to think anew. At other times he acted like the wandering Greek Cynic preacher, suffering for his teachings and standing up against the corrupt authorities

of his time. Many parallels can be drawn, but, Jesus stands out as a unique religious teacher who was beyond comparison (Hill, 62).

The mission of Christ was Prophetic in nature: In many ways, Jesus combines the offices of teacher and prophet. Prophets of old tended to arise in situations of cultural or religious crisis; they appeal first and foremost to alienated groups within a society; they are deemed to possess special gifts of insight into the nature of the present reality; and they are unusually gifted with rhetorical powers of speech. The ethical prophet is also noted for critiquing the unjust sufferings of marginal groups and for playing a significant role in redefining the tradition. Evidently, Jesus appeared after the long prophetic silence of the inter-testamental period, and fulfills each of these criteria in his teaching ministry.

Jesus' methods and miracles

One thing that characterized the mission and ministry of Jesus was the working of miracle, he actually started his ministry with a miracle in Cana of Galilee where he turned water to wine. Since then, as he met the people who needed the miraculous, he attended to them without hesitation. One thing that Jesus' method taught in regards to his miracles was that in all, Jesus did not set out to perform miracle, so he did not advertise his miracles before the acts. Jesus did not invite people to come and receive miracle. Clearly, his miracles were neither advertorial nor publicity focused. He did not use miracle to advertise his ministry but to help the needy. In all of the cases recorded in the Bible, Jesus' miracle experience were circumstantial, and spontaneous rather than been programmatic.

Jesus' miracles were secretive as they were not to draw attention to him but to his father. It was also clear from the Bible that Jesus did not present his miracles as a proof of his divine status. Even when people demanded for sign he refused to perform (Matt 12:38-39).

There is this unmistakable 'otherness' about Jesus and his miracle-performances, unlike what we see today, Jesus' miracles were for the people not for him or his ministry.

Steps in Jesus' Mission Method

Looking at Jesus' mission strategy, Ellen G. White in her book, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143 summarized Jesus' mission methods in five steps. She added, Christ's method alone will bring true success.

1. *He mingled with people:* Jesus was truly involved in the lives of the people upon which he carried out his mission. He did not cut himself out of the people. To him, while impersonal methods can support ministries, they can never replace personal, hands-on, mingling ministry. For this, mission workers must be prepared to move out of their comfort zones and form relationships with people who are different from them.
2. *He Showed Sympathy:* To Ellen G. White, mission practitioners must come close to those for whom they labor, that they may not only hear their voice, but shake their hand, learn their principles, and feel their sympathy.
3. *He Ministered to People's Needs:* Not only should

mission workers mingle and be sympathetic, they should also minister to people's needs. Though types of ministry will vary from place to place. The mission of Christ followers should include meeting not only the spiritual needs of the people but also the social, emotional, psychological, physical and economic sphere of their lives. Their mission should include services such as counseling, feeding the hungry, caring for kids, teaching life skills, and conducting community activities. The possibilities are as varied as the needs. Health ministry will almost always connect to people's needs. Jesus spent time ministering to people's needs, physically touching their lives.

4. *He Won People's Confidence*: Another step was that Jesus tried to win the confidence of his mission recipients. Through mingling, showing sympathy, and ministering to needs, mission workers show people that they care not just to the spiritual needs of the people but that they care for the total man. The care and love should not depend on them accepting Jesus, but on the need to be Jesus' hand to help the people. When we show people that our care has no strings attached, we build and win their confidence.
5. *He Bid Them to Follow Jesus*: This is ultimately considered to be a vital step in Jesus' method because of how it leads people to Christ, resulting from the holistic ministry of the mission workers. This arises from the first four steps, where relationships are built. According to Ellen G. White,

when people start questioning our motivation and why we live the way we do, it is natural to start talking about the Source of our spiritual commitment. Every center will include intentional plans to start small groups and plant new congregations.

Clearly, there are lots of lessons to learn from the mission and ministry model of Jesus Christ. He did not only consider his method or strategy, he was concerned with his purpose, and that dictated his approach to carrying out his mission. The lesson for us, is that while we contemplate our method(s), we should not mind the purpose of our mission and ministry. To do otherwise is to work against Christ's model, and the result will be clear. It will not produce the kind of result that Jesus would expect of us. The best therefore, will be to apply only the Jesus' model.

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CHAPTER NINE

CHRIST'S TEACHING METHODS

Michael Onyedikachi Akpa

I. Introduction

Jesus Christ was the great Master Teacher who sought to communicate uncommon divine truth to His audience in such common, simple and understandable ways that His audience had no need of interpreters to understand His teachings. In order to achieve this, He utilized several methods, techniques and rhetoric devices prevalent in His days. Although these methods, techniques and rhetoric devices did not originate from Him, He utilized them in manners that distinguished Him from His contemporaries. This lesson explores the prominent methods employed by Jesus Christ in His teaching. Unless otherwise indicated, all direct quotations from and reference to the Bible are from the New International Version.

II. Particular Features of Jesus' Teaching Methods

The techniques employed by Jesus in His teachings were characterized by unique features of which the following are but prominent examples.

A. Oral Method of Teaching

Jesus did not write on scrolls or tables of stone. In fact, His only act of writing was done on the sand (John 8:3-9) which was blown away by the wind. Instead, He taught His audience largely through spoken words or oral communication. Study and summarize the following teaching events and activities of Jesus and observe the utilization of oral communication.

- a. Matthew 5:1, 2 (KJV)
- b. Matthew 7:24-28
- c. Luke 4:21, 22
- d. John 8:28-30

B. Methods Adapted to Audience

Jesus adapted His teaching methods to suit His audience. He never applied one method of teaching to everyone at every circumstance. He proceeded from the known to the unknown. See the demonstration of this paradigm in the following passages.

- a. John 4:10-14 (from physical water to spiritual water)
- b. John 6:48-58 (from physical food to spiritual food)

C. Simplified Language

In view of the fact that most of those who followed Jesus on daily basis were simple and ordinary people, it becomes pertinent for Him to communicate to them in simple language and He did. Although His language was simplified and direct, yet it was forceful and authoritative. The following selected testimonies from those who heard Him confirm this claim.

- a. Luke 24:13-32, especially vs. 32
- b. Mark 1:21, 22
- c. John 7:45, 46

D. Patient Teaching

Jesus Christ was a patient Teacher. He never went too fast nor did He rush His students or audience while teaching. Instead, He gave them time to digest each spiritual truth before dishing out another. He knew when to stop teaching so as to allow the audience adequate time to contemplate what they have heard. He highlighted this principle in a very important maxim He postulated while teaching on the Mount of Blessings: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. *Each day has enough trouble of its own*” (Matthew 6:34, *emphasis mine*).

E. Use of Figurative and Symbolic Language Devices in Teaching

Although Jesus taught in simple and direct language for the benefit of the simple-minded audience, He often challenged His hearers to step up their reasoning and thinking capacities by utilizing figurative or symbolic rhetoric devices in His teaching. In such instances, He couched His teaching in one or more of the rhetoric devices briefly discussed below.

1. Overstatement.

This is an exaggeration of a statement or fact in such a way that forcefully brings out the meaning of the

statement. Study the following passages and identify the utilization of overstatement by Jesus in His teaching:

- a. Matthew 5:29, 30
- b. Matthew 10:34
- c. Luke 14:26

2. **Hyperbole.**

Like an overstatement, a hyperbole employs exaggeration. However, the difference lies largely in the fact that the exaggeration in a hyperbole is actually a gross one that makes a literal fulfillment impossible. Identify how Jesus used this principle in His teaching in the following passages:

- a. Matthew 6:2-4
- b. Matthew 7:3-5
- c. Matthew 23:23, 24
- d. Mark 10:24-26

3. **Pun.**

This involves the humorous use of a word or expression to suggest another that sound the same. It is a play on words that sound alike but may suggest two or more different meanings. It may also involve a play on the same word that has two different meanings. See the demonstration of this device by Jesus in the following passages:

- a. Matthew 16:18; *here, Peter (meaning rock or stone) is different from the rock on which Christ will build His Church.*
- b. Matthew 23:23

4. **Simile.**

This refers to a figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another, often connected by words such as “like”, “as”, and “seems”. Numerous examples of this device abound in the Gospels. See for example, the following statements of Jesus in His teachings where the concepts of similes are highlighted:

- a. Matthew 10:16 - “I am sending you out *like* sheep among wolves”.
- b. Matthew 12:40 - “For *as* Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”.
- c. Matthew 23:27, 28 - “You are *like* whitewashed tombs, . . . on the outside you *appear* to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness”.

5. **Metaphor.**

Like a simile, a metaphor employs a direct comparison between two essentially dissimilar things or concepts. However, there is the absence of the comparative particles “like” or “as”. This makes the comparison in a metaphor more forceful. See for example, the following statements of Jesus in His teachings where the concepts of metaphors are highlighted:

- a. Matthew 5:13 - “You are the salt of the earth”;
[NOT “You are *like* the salt”], etc.
- b. John 6:35 - “I am the bread of life”.

- c. John 8:12 - "I am the light of the world".
- d. John 15:5 - "I am the vine; you are the branches".

6. Proverb.

A proverb is a wise saying, as striking, memorable statement that at times gives advice on moral behavior. Such a statement often becomes an ethical maxim passed from one generation to another until it becomes engraved in the people's worldview and communication. Africans would easily identify with this method of teaching since it is commonly used especially by the elders to couch deep and tough sayings in such a manner as to communicate them without hurting the sensibilities of the audience. See the following examples where Jesus utilized proverbs in His teaching:

- a. Matthew 6:21 - "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also".
- b. Matthew 26:52 - "All who draw the sword will die by the sword".
- c. Mark 3:24, 25 - "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand".
- d. Luke 4:23 - "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!'"

7. Riddle.

This is another form of wise saying whereby the speaker couches his thoughts in a hidden manner so as to challenge the listeners to discover the hidden or concealed meaning of what is said. A classical example in the Old

Testament was used by Sampson to challenge the thinking of the Philistines in Judges 14:12-14.

Jesus utilized a riddle to couch His teaching about His death burial and resurrection when he said: "Destroy *this temple*, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19, *emphasis mine*). Unfortunately, the Jews misinterpreted the riddle and thought that Jesus was referring to the Temple in Jerusalem which was built for forty-six years (John 2:20; Mark 14:58). But in actual sense, Jesus used the "temple" to refer to His "body" (John 2:21, 22). He also utilized a riddle when He used the name "Elijah" to conceal the identity and mission of John the Baptist (Mark 9:12, 13).

8. Paradox.

A paradox employs statements that, on the surface, appear unreasonable, self-contradictory or at variance with common sense but upon closer investigation, or when explained, may prove to be logical. Jesus utilized paradoxes in His teaching. Identify this principle in His teaching in the following passages:

- a. Mark 6:4
- b. Mark 8:35
- c. Mark 4:22-25
- d. Mark 12:41-44

9. Irony.

An irony is an expression of meaning by use of words which normally would convey the opposite. It refers in a broader sense to an event or result opposite of what one would normally expect. Jesus employed ironies in His

teaching and sayings in the following passages for example:

- a. Matthew 16:2, 3
- b. Matthew 23:29-35
- c. Luke 12:16-20

F. Use of Questions

Jesus often used questions to get His audience involved in the learning process or to draw from His audience the correct answers which He sought. The incident at Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27-32) clearly illustrates Jesus' use of questions in teaching. By asking His disciples who people say He is, Jesus got His disciples involved in the assessment process. Their responses indicated that people perceived Jesus from varying perspectives. By directing the same question to His disciples, He helped them assess their perception of their Master. Study the following passages and confirm the importance of the use of questions in Jesus' teachings.

- a. Matthew 12:11, 12, 22-29
- b. Mark 8:17-21
- c. Mark 11:27-33
- d. Luke 10:36, 37
- e. Luke 22:35

G. Use of Parables

Technically, a parable is a simile but in the form of a story or narrative. A parable is a story by which truth can be seen although the story itself may not necessarily be real. Generally, parables reveal truth to those who are

willing to receive it by such is concealed from others who do not care about the lessons in the parables.

1. Parables of Jesus

Jesus taught His audience with so many parables that it would be redundant to list all of them as contained in the Gospel accounts. In your study of the account of the Gospels, pay attention to the variety of parables which Jesus used in teaching His audience. Below are selected examples of the parables of Jesus; the parable of:

- a. The lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7)
- b. The lost coin (Luke 15:8-10)
- c. The lost son (Luke 15:11-32)
- d. The sower (Matthew 13:3-23)
- e. The wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30)
- f. The mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32)
- g. The ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)
- h. The talents (Matthew 25:14-30)
- i. The workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)
- j. The good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37)
- k. The dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50)
- l. The hidden treasure in the field (Matthew 13:44)

2. How to Interpret Parables of Jesus

In casting His parables as recorded in the Gospels, Jesus generally utilized symbols which His hearers were familiar with and are drawn from the common experiences of everyday life. These experiences were usually based on specific incidents that had recently occurred or that they could see at the time. The narrative was simple and brief and its conclusion was usually so obvious that there was no

room for uncertainty and ambiguity. Therefore, in view of the symbolic nature of parables, attempts to interpret the parables of Jesus Christ should consider the following principles:

- a. Although drawn from the natural order of everyday life, the symbols used in constructing the parables are intended to teach spiritual lessons.
- b. The focus and message of the parable, being spiritual in scope, always transcend the concrete realities expressed by the symbols used in constructing the parable.
- c. Every parable has a central message that it is intended to convey. Seek to find this central message in any parable being interpreted.
- d. The Introduction and Conclusion of the parables of Jesus usually helps in identifying the central message intended.
- e. Not every specific detail of the symbols used in constructing the parable has corresponding spiritual interpretation or meaning. Details of a parable become significant only as they contribute to the clarification of the central truth or message intended.
- f. A parable is a mirror by which truth can be seen; it is not truth itself.
- g. The context in which a parable is given (the place, circumstances, persons to whom it was spoken and the problem under discussion) must be taken into consideration as a major key to interpretation.
- h. In view of the fact that a parable is given primarily

to illustrate truth, and usually one particular truth, no doctrine should be based on the incidental details of a parable (Akpa, 2009:41-41 and Nichol, 1978:204).

3. Why Jesus Christ Used Parables to Teach

Jesus used parables to teach His audience for the following major reasons:

- a. To arouse interest, attention, and the spirit of inquiry;
- b. To impart unpopular, and sometimes unpleasant and unwanted truth, without arousing prejudice;
- c. To evade (avoid being contradicted by) the spies who relentlessly pursued Him;
- d. To create in the minds of His audience lasting impressions;
- e. To restore nature as an avenue for knowing God.

III. General Principles Demonstrated in Jesus' Teaching Methods

The following principles were aptly demonstrated through the various methods employed by Jesus Christ in His teaching ministry:

1. **Authoritative Teaching:** unlike the Scribes, Jesus "taught as one who had authority" (Mat 7:29). In His teaching, Jesus was so certain about His subject matter, methods of teaching and expected learning outcomes that He never used such expressions as "perhaps," "maybe," "probably," "I think," etc. He delivered facts and spoke certainties. He did not

indulge in any speculation or guesswork, but would often say, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee" (John 3:3, 5; 5:19, 24, 25; 6:53, KJV).

2. **Determination to Make His Listeners Think for Themselves:** Christ determined to stimulate interest rather than supply answers. He refrained from giving direct answers to questions like "Who is my neighbor" (Luke 10:29). Instead, by engaging the expert in the law with a story and redirecting the lawyer's question back to him, Jesus led him to provide an answer to his own question (Luke 10:36, 37).
3. **Living by What He Taught:** Jesus taught His audience to forgive others as God has forgiven them (Matthew 6:12, 14-15; 18:23-35). He not only taught this principle of forgiveness, but also demonstrated it in His personal life by forgiving even those who were crucifying Him to death on the cross (Luke 23:33, 34).
4. **Genuine Interest in the Welfare of His Audience:** On several occasions, Jesus showed genuine interest in the welfare of those who were in His audience and touched them in close and personal ways. For instance,
 - a. Jesus had close relationship with Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42; cf. John 11:1-45).

- b. He had compassion on the crowd and expressed it in various ways which included:
 - i. Healing their sick ones (Matthew 14:14; 20:30-34),
 - ii. Teaching them (Mark 6:34),
 - iii. Feeding them (Matthew 14:14-21; 15:32-38; Mark 6:34-44; 8:2-9).

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CHAPTER TEN

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Michael Onyedikachi Akpa

I. Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount, preached by Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:1-7:29), has been identified as “the great rule of life” (White, 1940:314). Linking it with the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17), the Sermon on the Mount provides moral codes for Christians and those who believe in the Bible (Adetunji, 2012:17; Blomberg, 2009:143-144; Bacon, 1918:56-66). Similarly, the Sermon on the Mount has been identified as the inaugural message of Jesus Christ at the beginning of His earthly ministry which “elucidates the principles on which the kingdom of God operates. The Sermon outlines in practical terms, what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Christ” (Akpa, 2013:1). Consequently, the above views highlight the value and significance of the Sermon on the Mount to followers of Christ (Christians) in all places at all times. Through the Sermon on the Mount, Christ sought to:

- a. Announce certain qualifications that citizens of the kingdom of God will have to incorporate into their own character and lives;
- b. Undo the effects of wrong education and false teaching on His audience;
- c. Give the right perception about the kingdom of God;
- d. Clarify the nature of the Messiah's character.

In this long discourse done in one sitting, Jesus taught and expanded several principles on which the kingdom of God operates. In context therefore, His teachings on the Sermon on the Mount revolve around the following crucial issues:

- a. The Beatitudes (5:1-12);
- b. Kingdom Metaphors: Salt and Light (5:13-16);
- c. Affirmation and Validation of the Old Testament (5:17-20);
- d. Anger as Killing (5:21-26);
- e. Lust as Adultery (5:27-30);
- f. Divorce (5:31-32);
- g. Swearing and Oath-taking (5:33-37);
- h. Resistance, Vengeance and Retaliation (5:38-42);
- i. Perfect (Impartial or Mature) Relationship (5:43-48);
- j. Acts of Righteousness: Almsgiving, Prayer and Fasting (Matthew 6:1-18);
- k. Treasure, Wealth, Worries, and the Kingdom of God (6:19-34);
- l. Judging (Condemning) One Another Versus the Golden Rule (7:1-12);

- m. The Wide and Narrow Gates (7:13-14);
- n. Warning against False Prophets (7:15-23);
- o. Strong versus Weak Spiritual Foundations (7:24-27);

II. Essentials of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-7:27)

The discussions of the essentials of the Sermon on the Mount to a great extent reflect a summary of the outline of the issues mentioned above as covered by Christ in His Sermon in Matthew 5:1-7:27. The rest of the presentation draws heavily from Akpa (2013):1-156 and White (1940):298-314.

A. The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12)

The term, *beatitude*, although not in the Bible, is commonly used to designate the Introduction of Jesus' inaugural Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3-12 and Luke 6:20-23. The English expression, *beatitudes* and its Latin root, *beatitudo* "blessedness," "blessed" are derived from the translation of *makarios* (pl. *makarioi*) in the Greek text of Matthew 5:3-12, meaning "blessed," "happy," and "fortunate." Note that the pronouncement of blessings was not made on a particular single individual. Instead, the Greek text uses *makarioi*, the plural of *makarios*, to mediate the blessings to the audience as a corporate group.

1. **The Poor in Spirit (Matthew 5:3).** Jesus is not celebrating or promoting material poverty by any means in this instance. Since He is the life-giver and

Sustainer, He does not imply that all those who follow Him must be materially poor or deprived of the necessities of life. Instead, Jesus pronounced blessings on those who are poor in spirit because they recognize their spiritual wretchedness and feel the need for redemption through Christ's saving grace. This fits well the spiritual conditions that characterized the Jewish nation when Jesus began His ministry. Ridden with spiritual decay, the people were spiritually poor. Although their leaders knew it, they continued to offer the people false religiosity through temple rituals that were sometimes profane and devoid of spirituality. This situation is similar to what is obtained in the spiritual arena today. Because of preponderance of spiritual decay, there are many spiritual leaders who continue to offer people false hopes, religiosity and spirituality in the name of worship.

2. **Those who Mourn (Matthew 5:4).** While it may not be completely out of place to think of the blessings applying to those who are mourning because of mishaps and other ill occurrences, it is best to understand the concept of "mourning" here in light of the condition in the first pronouncement of blessings on those who recognize their spiritual poverty. Both are connected. When people recognize their poor spiritual condition, it naturally triggers a feeling of remorse for their spiritual depravity. A sense of guilt and sorrow over what led to the spiritual poverty is awakened. In their mournful state, such people desire a new experience that is rejuvenating. In essence, Jesus hints

that those who recognize their spiritual poverty and feel sorry for their poor state are blessed, fortunate, and happy. This is because they will be comforted by God Himself.

3. **The Meek (Matthew 5:5).** Meekness, as an attribute seemed awkward and out of place for an average Jew who lived in the land of Israel during the time of Jesus. Roman soldiers, officials, collaborators, and spying agents occupied the land of the Jews, as they did in every part of the Roman Empire. Meekness, in the face of arrogant occupation of one's treasured territory was considered a sign of weakness and premature surrender. Continued Jewish resistance of foreign occupation of their territory brought them under intense disfavour with Roman authorities. This bred violence and retaliation for acts of brutality. The Jews generally desired the cessation of Roman occupation of their territory so that they can inherit and peacefully live in the land which God promised their forefathers. By pronouncing blessings on those who are meek, Jesus directly promised those who heard Him on the Mount that the best way to inherit and enjoy living in the land was not by attempting to force the Romans out of their land. Instead, they could inherit the land and live peacefully in it by being meek (Matt 5:5).

Meekness, as taught by Jesus, involves being calm in the face of brutality, provocation, and oppression. It involves being calculative in reacting and responding to such brutal and oppressive conditions. Meekness

rejects vengeance and retaliation. It does not mean being stupid; instead, it calls for patience, endurance and longsuffering, knowing that at the end, the oppressor gets tired when no one resists him.

4. **Those who Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness (Matthew 5:6).** Jesus pronounced blessings on those who by their lives express their desire and longing after doing what is right and just. Most of those who heard Jesus on the Mount actually had no genuine human reasons to hunger and thirst after righteousness. In their days, doing what is right was not an extolled virtue. Those who lived according to God's instructions in the OT did not have an easy life. On the contrary, those who connived and collaborated with the Roman authorities became rich. The tax and revenue collectors extorted money and material things from others to enrich themselves in the pretext of carrying out their official duties. The rich, wealthy and powerful gratified and satisfied themselves through feasting, eating and drinking.

Jesus drew the contrast by reminding His hearers that true satisfaction does not come from feasting, eating, drinking, merrymaking and enjoying the excesses and luxuries of this life. Instead, true satisfaction comes from seeking after the will of God, desiring what is right and just, and doing them. This implies that although one may lack the luxuries of this life, yet one could still be satisfied by the mere fact that one has done what is righteous and just in the sight of God. Thus, the

Christian who today may live in deprivation may still derive satisfaction by longing after doing what is right and just in the sight of God, even when the majority of the people think and act otherwise. Righteousness, as extolled by Jesus in His teaching, is not received by painful struggles, wearisome toils, long pilgrimages to holy sites or gifts and sacrifices (Romans 3:10). Instead, it is freely offered to every soul that hungers and thirsts to receive it.

5. **The Merciful (Matthew 5:7).** Blessings are pronounced by Christ on those who are merciful toward others. In view of the atmosphere that characterized the life of the Jews under Roman rule, it was natural for the Jews to deal ruthlessly with any of their enemies who depended on them for mercy. Why would a Jew desire to show mercy to a Roman soldier, official, tax collector, or a Samaritan? That was grossly inconceivable. By not showing mercy to foreign enemies, the Jews gradually began to lose their ability to show mercy even among themselves. With time, segregating the show of mercy became engraved in their teaching to the point that they were taught to love their neighbours and hate their enemies (Matt 5:43). In the parable of the Good Samaritan who helped the wounded victim and paid the bill for his treatment (Luke 10:30-37), Jesus rebuked the inability of the Jews to show mercy even to a wounded victim who probably was a Jew (Luke 10:30). In what ways can we show mercy to people? What are the challenges to showing mercy to people today? What assurance do

we have from Christ that could spur us to continue to show mercy to people today, even against all odds?

6. **The Pure in Heart (Matthew 5:8).** For the Jew as well as the Greek, the heart, (*kardia*), is the seat of reasoning, emotions, feeling, and decision-making. The presentation of the heart in the Bible indicates that the heart is neutral and ambivalent. The wise man observes that the heart should be guarded with all diligence because “it is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23). An OT prophet laments that the heart is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, KJV). Evil and unholy acts originate from the heart (Matthew 5:28; 15:18-19). Forgiveness (Matthew 18:35) and compassion (Luke 7:13) flow from the heart. Jesus affirms that what people say with their mouth is but a tip of the iceberg of what they harbour in their hearts (Matthew 12:34; Luke 6:45). Ultimately, only the Lord God himself is able to look into and know the human heart (1 Samuel 16:7; Acts 1:24). The heart can only be pure when one allows Christ to cleanse it. When Christ cleanses the heart, it becomes a clean dwelling place for God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who is the Seal of God on the believer (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). A pure heart is constantly fed and kept alive through communion with God by studying and meditating on His word and prayer. Christ promises that the pure in heart shall see God (Matt 5:8). The reverse is the case; that no one with an impure heart can see God.

7. **The Peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).** Peace has been a very important need of people in every generation in earth's history. Even in today's world, peace is highly desired in the face of interpersonal, corporate, and even international conflicts that pervade the society. It is obvious that those who choose to follow the path of peace are often perceived as weak and cowardly. The case was not different in the time of Jesus. There are so many peace talks and negotiations going on today at global level. However, there is no peace because none of the parties at the negotiation table is actually seeking peace. Even those who parade themselves as arbiters are not impartial in their bids to secure peace among individuals, corporate entities and nations.

It is therefore obvious that the peace of the present world order is radically different from the peace which Jesus had in mind in this pronouncement of blessing on the Mount of Blessings. No wonder He distinguished the peace He bequeathed His disciples from worldly peace in His valedictory speech and prayer on the last night prior to His arrest (John 14:27). Christ's desire is that for His followers to become the true children of their Father in heaven, they are to be impartial in their relationships with others (Matthew 5:43-48) and thus secure peace among people (Matthew 5:9).

8. **Those Who Are Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake (Matthew 5:10).** The blessing here is meant for those who are being pursued, sought after, trailed or tracked, or hunted with evil intentions even though they did

what is right. In the face of this, therefore, this blessing sounds paradoxical. Why on earth would one consider oneself blessed, fortunate, or happy for being persecuted for doing what is right and just? This is because the world loves sin and hates righteousness. This was a major cause of the Jewish leaders' hostility against Jesus and His followers (White, 1940:306). It is very clear that the children of God, as citizens in the reign of God, operate on different principles and values from the world. This would often bring them into conflict with the world and endanger them.

By way of application, when was the last time, as a child of God, when your decision to stand by what is right got you into trouble with your colleagues, boss, friends, teacher, or even spouse? In our present time, it is difficult to be different from others by standing for what is right and just. The common trend is to follow the band wagon. But Jesus calls on His followers to rise above the low standards that have been set for them today by a perverse and reprobate generation. Have you been in trouble with your colleagues at work because you rendered a correct account of your expenditure and returned unspent money while they manipulated figures and demanded extra refunds? Have you been hated by your fellow students because you refused to assist them cheat in an examination? Have you been called names because you would not engage in sexual immorality under pressure? Have you been framed and

fired at work because you refused to connive with everyone else to cover a shady deal? The blessings pronounced by Christ are still valid for you today.

9. **Those who are Insulted, Persecuted and Falsely Accused because of Christ (Matthew 5:11, 12).** Apostle Peter points out that it is noble and commendable for a Christian to suffer, be persecuted because of doing what is right and just and be falsely accused and insulted because of Christ. However, he warns that it is ignoble for a Christian to suffer and be insulted for a crime or wrong-doing (1 Peter 2:19-23; 3:14-17; 4:12-19). This is in line with what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:11, 12. It should be noted, therefore, that the emphasis on the pronouncement in view is on the fact that the insults, persecutions, and accusations on the Christian are falsely made and for the sake of Christ. In essence, the Christian is being insulted, persecuted and accused for things he/she did not commit and all because of the name of Christ which he/she bears and defends (Matthew 5:11). Under such conditions, Jesus desires that His followers should not be overwhelmed or frustrated because of insults and false accusations. Instead, He desires that they rejoice and be glad when they are insulted, persecuted, and falsely accused for His sake (Matthew 5:12). He advances two major reasons for the rejoicing. First, great reward awaits them in heaven. Second, they are not the first to suffer in such a manner. They are towing the line of the prophets before them who were treated in such a manner.

B. Kingdom Metaphors: Salt and Light (Matthew 5:13-16)

In this teaching, Jesus used salt and light as metaphors to describe the characteristics and operations of the children of the kingdom of God. In order for the modern reader to understand and appreciate Jesus' use of salt as a metaphor for the kingdom of God, there is the need to ascertain (1) what salt meant to the people who heard Jesus and what they did with it; (2) whether Jesus' use of salt in this passage is literal or figurative.

In the time of Jesus, people in the land of Israel used salt for various purposes which included: (a) preserving vulnerable and perishable (especially food) items from decay; (b) disinfecting objects and wounded body parts by washing them with salt solution; (c) sinking a filled pit-toilet; (d) enhancing the taste of food. In view of the above, when Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth," He and His audience had at least these usages of salt in mind. In essence, Jesus used salt as a metaphor to teach spiritual lessons. Therefore, salt in Matthew 5:13 should be understood in a metaphorical sense, wherein Jesus desires His followers to act like salt in their environment by: (a) preserving moral purity in their environment, thus, preventing moral decay around them; (b) disinfecting the moral decay around them; (c) sinking the filled pit-toilet of sin around them; (d) enhancing the taste (quality) of the lives of people around them. As it is with salt, Jesus used light in a metaphorical sense to teach spiritual lessons. Light has unique characteristics. (a) Light illuminates

thereby exposing what is covered or hidden by darkness. (b) Light and darkness are arch-rivals. (c) Both cannot co-exist; one must leave for the other to come in. (d) The entrance of one chases the other away.

Summarizing Jesus' teaching on salt and light, the life of a child of God acts like salt and light in his or her environment (home, work, school, etc). As salt, the Christian acts like a catalyst: participating in a spiritual reaction to bring about positive changes in others on moral issues, but remains morally unchanged in the process. As light, the life of the Christian illuminates her environment, exposes the works of darkness, and points people to the way of God. When the child of God loses his virtues and integrity, he becomes useless to the world (Matthew 5:13). Thus, the child of God should not contribute to moral decay in her environment. Instead, his life preserves moral purity and prevents moral decay. Of necessity and by divine design, darkness and light cannot cohabit in the child of God. Likewise, the good works of a child of God cannot be hidden. They will always show and people will praise God for such good works.

C. Validating the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17-20).

In this teaching, Jesus set out to validate the *Law and the Prophets* (Old Testament in this context) as the foundational basis of His teaching and binding on His hearers as well. In order to forestall unnecessary excitement and possible misconception and antagonism among those who followed Him, Jesus made it unequivocally clear that His mission was not to destroy, abolish or set at naught the Old Testament through His

teaching. Rather, He came to make it complete or bring it to fulfilment (Matthew 5:17).

God's voice is still heard from every portion of Scripture, whether in the Old or New Testament. For example, there are invaluable lessons for the Christian today from the stories on the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan as we journey from the bondage of sin on earth to the heavenly Canaan. A Christian who refuses to study such portions of the OT as Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, for example, is bound to repeat most of the mistakes and commit most of the sins that the Israelites made and committed on their way to the land of Canaan which cost them entrance into the Promised Land. Thus, the Christian today should be careful not to believe those who claim that the Old Testament is no longer binding on the Christians today, just because such people find it difficult to live by the precepts espoused in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17); the dietary regulations (Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14); or the sanitary, hygienic, and relational regulations scattered all over Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

D. Anger as Killing (Matthew 5:21-26).

From this point onward in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus set out to correct the erroneous teachings on and interpretation of the commandments of the Old Testament, especially in the Pentateuch. The first issue Jesus addressed was on the relationship between anger and killing. The Jewish leaders appeared on the outside to

uphold the OT teaching that prohibits killing. But in real life, they condone getting angry at someone and also approve of and practice revenge and retaliation under certain prescribed conditions of provocation. In His teaching, Jesus contrasts the application of the interpretation of the Jewish leaders with the original divine intention regarding the injunctions expressed in the OT. The essence of Jesus' teaching is summarized in the table below.

Action	Consequences
Being <i>angry</i> with a brother	Liable to <i>judgment</i>
<i>Insulting</i> a brother	Liable to the <i>Council (Sanhedrin)</i>
Calling a brother a <i>fool</i>	Liable to <i>hell fire</i>

From the above illustration, it is evident that the new teaching from Jesus Christ has a wider scope on killing. The Jewish leaders narrowed killing down to physical violence that takes life. Jesus extends killing to include acts of emotional and verbal violence that tend to minimise the value, worth and well-being of a person. In the same vein, if someone was liable to judgment for killing but liable to hell fire for calling a brother a fool, it becomes paradoxical for one to receive a greater punishment for an offence that is considered to be of lighter consequence. Thus, it becomes evident that it is more difficult to escape judgment under the new teaching. However, Jesus drops a net to catch the falling sinner by recommending *reconciliation* as the way of escaping the judgment, the Council, and hell fire.

E. Lust as Adultery (Matthew 5:27-30).

The teaching of Jesus on adultery in Matthew 5:27-30 stands in sharp contrast to the interpretation of the Jewish leaders. For the Jewish leaders, you are guilty of adultery only when you are caught in it. In essence, as long as you are not caught in adultery, you are not guilty of it. However, in His teaching, clearly points out that adultery is not only an act; it extends to include a lustful thought and a lustful look. After all, a look triggers a thought and a thought triggers an action. It is a chain and a continuum. Jesus implies that no one, male or female, is free from adultery. It is obvious that no sane and healthy human being can boldly claim not to have taken a lustful look at the opposite sex at least once. That being the case, we are all guilty of adultery, at least from Jesus' definition of it as demonstrated in Matthew 5:28.

Jesus' recommendation on dealing with adultery here; namely cutting off the right hand and plucking off the right eye (Matthew 5:29, 30) needs more careful analysis. In summary, the meaning of the Greek *dexios*, "right" used in qualifying the eye and the hand include a place of "favour," "honour," and "exaltation." In view of the above, a plausible explanation is that Jesus recommends that we tame or control our favourite, precious, valued body parts that are prone to sin so as to save the rest of the body. Else, the entire body will be destroyed with the body parts that are prone to sin.

F. Divorce (Matthew 5:31-32).

Regarding divorce, Jesus explains that God's plan for marriage is that it should bind the couple together in a

mutual and loving relationship that brings companionship, joy, happiness, and fulfillment for both partners. Understood this way, anything else that has gone wrong in marital and family relationships is not from God but a result of humanity's inclination to self and an inclination toward God's arch-adversary, Satan.

These days, people (regardless of religion, culture, education, and status) generally think that divorce is the solution to marital problems. However, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus indicated that divorce is not a desirable solution to marital conflicts. The only exception is in the case of marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). For an expanded understanding of Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage, study Matthew 19:1-12. A comparison of Jesus' teaching on divorce in Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:1-12 clearly indicates that the two dangerous worms that are capable of eating the fabric of any marriage, without respect, are (1) adultery and (2) hardness of the human heart. Adultery is sinful. Hardness of the human heart is dangerous. Divorce is painful. Children of God should do whatever is humanly possible not to allow any of the trio to eat into the fabric of their marital relationships and destroy their families.

G. Swearing and Oath-taking (Matthew 5:33-37).

The setting for this discourse is on keeping one's covenant or promises made to the Lord, and by extension, to others. The teaching cited by Jesus in Matthew 5:33 affirms that the Jewish leaders required people to validate their covenantal promises by taking oaths or swearing.

God prohibited His people from swearing falsely by His name (Leviticus 19:12; see Exodus 20:7) and required that people redeem and not break their vows (Numbers 30:1-15; Deuteronomy 23:21-23). Jesus made it clear in this teaching that what God requires from us is the truth and nothing but the truth at all times. In essence, for Christ, truth does not need anything else to validate it. The way out is to simply tell the truth and live by it. The expression, "Let your 'Yes' be YES and your 'No' be NO" (Matthew 5:37), is pivotal because it is the heart of Jesus' teaching on the subject in view. Instead of swearing or taking oath, Jesus requires that we simply tell the truth through either "Yes" or "No". According to Him, anything else beyond "Yes" or "No" does not originate from God but from Satan, the evil one.

H. Resistance, Vengeance and Retaliation (Matthew 5:38-42).

In the time of Jesus, the Jews found ample justification for their vengeful acts against the Romans and against one another as exhibited in the life for life, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth (*tit-for-tat*) code of conduct prescribed in the Pentateuch (see, for example, Exodus 21:22-25; Leviticus 24:17-20; Deuteronomy 19:21). Knowing that such justification stemmed from unforgiving and vengeful heart, Jesus sought to point His audience on the Mount to a new way of responding to provocation and oppression. The central message of Jesus in His teaching as expressed in not resisting an evil person, turning the other cheek, handing over one's coat, and going the second mile (Matthew 5:39-41) are alternative ways of

saying, “Avoid confrontation with an evil person.” The reason is not far-fetched. An evil person can hurt, disfigure, and vandalise you and all you hold dear, but you are not expected to do the same to the evil person. An evil person can kill you but you are not expected to kill the evil person. If so, it is fruitless for a child of God to engage in a fight or confrontation with an evil person.

I. Perfect (Impartial or Mature) Relationship (Matthew 5:43-48).

By the time of Jesus, the tension between the Jews and people of other nationalities, cultures, and background had grown to the point of the Jews choosing whom to love and greet and whom not to love or greet. Considering people of different stock as Tax Collectors and Gentiles (pagans, or heathen), the Jews chose to love and greet only fellow Jews, ignoring people of different backgrounds. This sets the background for understanding Jesus' pronouncements here in Matt 5:43-48. The thrust of Jesus teaching here is that anyone who desires to be like God the heavenly Father must think and act like God Himself, especially in relation to dealing with people of other races, religious convictions and nationalities. God demonstrates His “perfection” by sending the rain and sunshine on everyone, righteous and unrighteous alike, without discrimination (Matthew 5:44, 45). This is in sharp contrast with the attitude of those who heard Jesus on the Mount who chose to love only their neighbours (Matthew 5:43, 46) and greet only their brothers (Matthew 5:47). Christ's message to His audience

is straight to the point: Stop acting like the Tax Collectors and Gentiles who you consider as unworthy, evil and undeserving of God's mercies and grace. Be mature, impartial and complete as your heavenly Father (Matthew 5:48).

J. Acts of Righteousness: Almsgiving, Prayer and Fasting (Matthew 6:1-18).

The Jewish national religion (Judaism) based on the Old Testament teaching, encouraged the people to perform several acts that were considered “acts of righteousness.” These included (1) giving to the poor through almsgiving, (2) prayer, both public and private, and (3) fasting. In full realisation of the abuse of these “acts of righteousness”, Jesus addressed them in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:1-18.

Concerning giving to the poor, Jesus offers His largely Jewish audience a new and better way of giving alms to the needy. They are not to send trumpeters ahead of them to announce their gifts. They are not to give their gifts so as to be seen, honoured and applauded by people. Jesus insists that a better way of giving gifts to the needy is to give them in secret (Matthew 6:3-4a). According to Jesus, this kind of secret giving attracts God's abundant blessings (Matthew 6:4b).

Concerning prayer, Jesus presents to His audience a better way to pray. They should keep their private prayers private by going into their rooms, closing the door and praying to God who sees in secret (Matthew 6:6). They should not babble or use repetitive expressions. They

should pray in simple language and manner, bearing in mind that they are praying to God who knows what they need even before they ask Him (Matthew 6:7, 8). This injunction is a rebuke to most Christians in this era, especially those who have the strong impression that God hears and answers prayers based on the intensity of the prayer and the passion exhibited by the one who prays. Consequently, they shout, jump, tramp, pound, and sometimes fall and roll on the ground, pleading with God to hear and answer them. While persistence is a virtue in prayer (Luke 18:1-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 18), Christians should not to pray to the God of Elijah as though they are praying to Baal (see 1 Kings 18:23-38).

Concerning fasting, Jesus prescribes a better way to fast. The key is not to make one's fasting become obvious to other people (Matthew 6:18a). In order to achieve that, the one fasting should wash his face in water and anoint his head with oil while fasting (Matthew 6:17). By looking normal while fasting, people's attention will not be attracted to oneself. The reward for this noble way of fasting is that God who sees in secret will reward the one who fasts in secret. Of certainty, God's blessings and rewards outweigh the praise of people. Ultimately, righteousness is a spiritual matter and should not be measured by physical and outward displays alone.

K. Treasure, Wealth, Worries, and the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:19-34).

As it is in many countries of the world today, the Jewish society in the time of Jesus was split into two clear socio-economic classes; namely the very rich and the very

poor. The gap between the two was obvious and yawning. The rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer. In essence, most people lived their daily lives with great anxiety and tension over how to make ends meet. Consequently, they pumped much of their energy into seeking wealth and making ends meet almost to the neglect of God and His instructions. In response to the situation in His teaching on the Mount, Jesus offered the people who heard Him a better way of making ends meet. It is by seeking God and His kingdom first, then the basic needs of life (food, drink, clothing) will be added by God (Matthew 6:33). This is also the central thought for what Jesus taught in Matthew 6:19-34 on choosing between two options: God or Wealth.

The summary of Jesus' teaching here is that it is impossible to faithfully serve God and wealth at the same time (Matthew 6:24). Therefore, we should not pursue money until it becomes a god for us and prevents us from seeking and finding the kingdom of God and His righteousness. We should not worry about tomorrow or even the issues of life of today as if God is not caring for us. The pagans chase after material things as though God does not care. Consequently, they miss God in the process. But for those who find God first He guarantees that they will not lack the basic needs of life (food, drink and clothing) in the context of Matthew 6:19-34.

L. Judging (Condemning) One another Versus the Golden Rule (7:1-12).

Nowadays, whenever someone tries to correct or

rebuke the sins and wrong-doings of another, it is usually common to hear the defaulter snap at the one who wants to correct or rebuke him/her with such comments as (a) "Stop judging me," (b) "You have no right to judge me," or (c) "The Bible says we should not judge" (with Matthew 7:1, 2 in view). However, almost everyone (Christian and even non-Christian) is quick to appeal to "the golden rule" in Matthew 7:12 when demanding fairness, justice, and equity at home, work, public facilities and everywhere else. From the context of Matthew 7:1-5 above, it is clear that Christ is not prohibiting pointing out people's sins and faults to them. In Matthew 18:15-20, He encouraged the offended to confront the one who sinned against him and point out his fault to him, but with the intention to win him back. This opens a window through which we may understand what Jesus means when He said, "Do not judge" in Matthew 7:1. The problem of the hypocritical Jews is clearly stated in Matthew 7:3-4. They attempt to see the speck of dust in the eyes of their brothers while a log of wood is inside their own eyes. Similarly, they seek to remove the speck of dust from the eyes of their brothers, doing nothing about the log of wood in their own eyes. They saw everything wrong with people of other backgrounds whereas they saw nothing wrong with the Jewish people. Consequently, they considered the Jews alone as deserving God's favour and grace.

Applying the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12) therefore, Jesus says in Matthew 7:1-12, "Do not judge people down and condemn them as not deserving God's grace and favour. If you do, you yourself will be judged

down and condemned." The same message goes to us today. We should not be like the hypocrites. Before we even seek to correct someone else, we will do well to first correct ourselves. While we may correct or rebuke people who commit sin or do wrong, we must bear in mind the ideal from Christ: to win them back and restore friendship and relationship. We should not seek to obtain God's blessings by trying to condemn others as undeserving of the same gestures we desire from God and seeking to hoard them exclusively for ourselves as the "worthy" and "deserving" people. Ultimately, only God reserves the prerogative of deciding who is condemned and who is unworthy of His blessings, mercies, and grace. Remember, He being impartial (Acts 10:34, 35), shares His blessings without discrimination (Matthew 5:43-48). Christ in His Sermon on the Mount calls upon us to do likewise.

M. The Wide and Narrow Gates (Matthew 7:13-14).

In the context of Matthew 7:13, 14 above, it is clear that Christ is discussing human access to eternal life and eternal destruction. The conditions for life and destruction are very clear. There is a choice to make, since there are only two options: (1) Broad road with a wide gate; (2) Narrow road with a narrow gate. Each choice has irrevocable eternal consequences. Jesus makes a recommendation to His hearers to choose the way that leads to life although it is narrow and small, with few people finding it.

In today's world, Jesus would not make sense at all. This is primarily because in the contemporary democracy-driven world: (a) the majority is always right.

Consequently, the opinion of the majority usually wins. (b) The minority is always wrong. Consequently, the opinion of the minority is usually voted down. However, in Matt 7:13, 14, Jesus clearly points out that eternal life:

- a. Is not a game of numbers; the majority could be wrong and the minority could be right;
- b. Is not subject to the decision of the majority;
- c. Is not subject to human opinions and preferences;
- d. Is purely a matter of individual choice.

In Matt 7:13, 14, Jesus implies that only a few people are ready and willing to choose wisely. Those who choose eternal life surrender to an ordered and programmed life. They do not live as they please. They do not have much space for frivolous living. There are several points of control (checks and balances) on the way to eternal life. In contrast, those who choose eternal destruction live an open and uncontrolled life. They live as they please. They have a lot of space for frivolous living. There are little or no points of control (checks and balances) on the way to eternal destruction; it is an “open” road. Although the voice of the people (majority) may prevail, God always decides differently. He stands with the minority that choose Him against the majority that ignore or reject Him.

N. Warning against False Prophets (Matthew 7:15-23).

People in desperation desire messages of hope. People in bondage desire a deliverer. Bruised and traumatised people desire something to soothe their wounds. People at the brink of being burned up at both

ends desire something to cushion their frustration. Under such circumstances of desperation, frustration, exasperation, and confusion, some smart people make their living on the backs of the gullible and fickle-minded who are ready to pay any price to obtain relief. It is under such precarious situations that false prophets thrive, usually in large numbers. They offer people false hopes; give them false information and even take the little they have from them to enrich themselves.

It is of great significance that the last major teaching in the series of messages Jesus gave on the Mountain warned the people about false prophets. If Jesus warned about false prophets while He was still on earth, such a warning becomes more pertinent now that He is not physically present with us. From the overall context of Matthew 7:15-23, Christ is fully aware of the activities of those who claim to prophesy and do miracles in His name. He is not desperate for His name to be used in doing great signs and wonders such as casting out demons, healing the sick, and raising the dead. Rather, He earnestly desires that those who appeal to His name in whatever they do should live their lives in harmony with His principles, teaching, instructions, and commandment. Prophets are declared false by Christ because they camouflage themselves so as to mask their true motives and intentions (Matthew 7:15). That is why Christ warns that it is by their fruits (long-term result of their works) not their appearance that we can identify them (Matthew 7:16-20).

Experiences reveal that false prophets usually take advantage of people who are impatient (unable to wait and

persevere), curious, depressed, greedy, desperate, frustrated, exasperated, and confused. On the contrary, those who live simple lives and patiently wait on God to deliver His promises in their lives hardly fall prey to false prophets. Such people do not make good customers for false prophets. I must admit here that the issue of dealing with false prophets is a sensitive and delicate one, especially since every servant is responsible to his master (Romans 14:4) and it takes time and patience to ascertain who a false prophet is. Nevertheless, everyone, without exception, has to be responsible for whatever happens in his or her interactions with and submission to the whims and caprices of false prophets.

O. Strong versus Weak Spiritual Foundations (Matthew 7:24-27).

In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus summarised and concluded His apparently long teaching on what it means to be a Christian who operates in the realm (kingdom) of God. In this summary and conclusion, Jesus employed architectural imagery (builders, buildings, and foundations) to drive His point home. He also draws the attention of His audience to fierce natural phenomena that usually test the strength and quality of building: rains, flood, and strong wind. The first builder built his house to last and withstand the pressure from the natural phenomena. On the contrary, although the second builder intended his house to stand, it crashed in the face of the natural phenomena. The difference between the two houses lies largely on the type of foundation on which they were built: rock or sand.

Notice that both the house of the wise and foolish builders alike was tested by the same natural phenomena: *rain, flood, and storm*. These natural phenomena represent trials, tests, temptations, and the vicissitudes of life, both physical and spiritual. This makes it clear, therefore, that every human being, both those who obey God and those who disobey God, will surely face and be tested by the challenges of life. Jesus does not guarantee immunity to those who are faithful to Him over the challenges and vicissitudes of life. Instead, He allows everyone, both those who are obedient to Him and those who are disobedient to Him to be exposed to life's challenges without bias. However, what Jesus guarantees is that those who hear His words and do them are so established in every aspect of their lives that they are able to withstand and survive the challenges and vicissitudes of life. Therefore, Christians today need to rise above the light of the popular teaching that is marketed everyday on the media that no evil or harm can come to a child of God. Such a teaching is not Bible-based, is not in harmony with the word of God and is not consistent with the teaching of Christ here in Matthew 7:24-27. The difficult truth, therefore, is that although the child of God may face life's challenges, such challenges will not overwhelm him or her because his or her life is deeply rooted in the word of God as the ROCK, a sure foundation.

III. Conclusion

In His teachings in the beatitude and the rest of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-7:27), Jesus Christ expatiated on the basic principles of the kingdom of God.

He also corrected the erroneous teachings of the religious leaders of His time on the Old Testament. In additions, He demonstrated how the anticipation of the Jews based on the Old Testament (eg. Psalm 24:3, 4; 37:5-11; 51:10; Isaiah 11:4, 5; 42:1-4; 52:13; 53:12; 57:15, 18, 19; 60:17; 61:1, 2) were met. Finally, He juxtaposed the virtues espoused in His teachings with the clashing worldly values such as pride, personal independence, power, pursuing happiness at all cost, pursuing personal needs, brutality, insensitivity, filthiness, deception, jungle justice, commotion, chaos, compromise and fledging faith. All these are valid for the follower of Christ today. The lesson is clear. Ultimately, only those who know and obey the principles of the kingdom of God espoused by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount from the Beatitudes to the houses built on the rock and sand (Matthew 5:1-7:27) are able to withstand the day-to-day pressures in every aspect of their lives, especially the spiritual dimension.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE LAST DAYS OF CHRIST'S EARTHLY LIFE

Joshua J. Zoaka

INTRODUCTION

The three and half years of Jesus' ministry on earth were years He spent in practical ministries of healing, teaching, and preaching, of which the Scripture testified that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" ('Acts 10:38). These years of gracious ministry did not please the archenemy (Satan) and his fallen angels, therefore through their human agents (the Pharisees, Sadducees, elders, etc.) the road the Messiah trod on was made rough with bitter opposition from Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary. However, without controversy, those years of the ministry were years worthy of meditation, more especially the last days of His earthly ministry. If we can spend some quality time each day to meditate upon the scene of Jesus' suffering for the fallen race, our minds will be "led to dwell upon the infinite sacrifice of Christ, on his

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mediation in our behalf. As we see his love, as we meditate upon his humiliation and sufferings, the same spirit of self-denial and sacrifice for the good of others will be kindled in our hearts. As we behold Jesus by the eye of faith, we shall be 'changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.'"¹

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY: "THY KING COMETH!"

Study: Matt 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19



Figure 1: Circa 30 A.D., Jesus Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Getty Images²

It is necessary to define the term "triumphant" in order to understand the sub topic we are about to study. According to Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary,

the term triumph is defined as “the joy or exultation of victory.” But in the Bible the word usually refers to God's victory. In the Old Testament it is used in connection to His victory over the enemies of His chosen people (see Ex. 15:1-21), the Israelites; while in the New Testament it is used in connection to His victory over the power of sin through Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary (see 2 Cor 2:14; Col 2:15).³ In addition, in the New Testament, when the word is used, it points to the entrance of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem which ushered in His passion week. Because of its importance, all the gospel writers recorded the event (see Matt 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19). These passages gave two perspectives to the event: “the synoptic writers follow Christ from Bethany, while John records the entry as the multitude which went out from Jerusalem to meet the procession saw it.”⁴

About 500 years before the birth of Christ, Prophet Zechariah predicted the triumphant entry of the Messiah into Jerusalem (Zech 9:9).⁵ Throughout His earthly ministry, Christ shunned any attempt to publicly flatter or adorn or coronate or crown Him as King of Israel (see John 6:14, 15). But now He even took the initiative in arranging this glorious, flamboyant, triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Israel's metropolitan and religious capital. What could have accounted for this sudden change of attitude?

For the Good News of salvation, death and resurrection of Christ on behalf of the race, to be heard by many, crowd is needed. History has it that during Jewish feast days national feelings were always very high. “At such a time Jerusalem and the villages round about were crowded. On one occasion a census was taken of the lambs slain at the [Passover Feast](#). The number was given as

256,000. There had to be a minimum of ten people per lamb; and if that estimate is correct it means that there must have been as many as 2,700,000 people at that Passover Feast.”⁶ In the words of Ellen G. White the cause of Jesus' sudden change of attitude came clear as thus:

Christ was following the Jewish custom for a royal entry. The animal on which He rode was that ridden by the kings of Israel, and prophecy had foretold that thus the Messiah should come to His kingdom. No sooner was He seated upon the colt than a loud shout of triumph rent the air. The multitude hailed Him as Messiah, their King. Jesus now accepted the homage which He had never before permitted, and the disciples received this as proof that their glad hopes were to be realized by seeing Him established on the throne. The multitude were convinced that the hour of their emancipation was at hand. In imagination they saw the Roman armies driven from Jerusalem, and Israel once more an independent nation.... Never before in His earthly life had Jesus permitted such a demonstration. He clearly foresaw the result. It would bring Him to the cross. But it was His purpose thus publicly to present Himself as the Redeemer. He desired to call attention to the sacrifice that was to crown His mission to a fallen world.... The events connected with this triumphal ride would be the talk of every tongue, and would bring Jesus before every mind. After His crucifixion, many would recall

these events in their connection with His trial and death. They would be led to search the prophecies, and would be convinced that Jesus was the Messiah; and in all lands converts to the faith would be multiplied.⁷

Other Reasons for and purpose of Christ's Triumphal Entry

1. To fulfill in every specific detail the prophecies given concerning the life and ministry of the Messiah (Zech 9:9; Matt 3:15).
2. To create a widespread, public awareness of the Messiahship and salvation ministry of Jesus.
3. To draw attention to the supreme sacrifice He would pay on the cross to crown His earthly mission.
4. The triumphal entry took place at the beginning of the Passover feast, which had most Jews home and in diaspora attending. Christ desired to present Himself as the real, antitypical "Passover Lamb" that takes away the sin of the world.
5. To call the attention of His followers, then and into the farthest future, to the significance of His atoning sacrifice. Through it many will be driven to study the prophecies concerning the Messiah in the Bible and see the light of truth and be saved.
6. The triumphant entry was but a dim foreshadowing of Christ's coming in the clouds of heaven with power and glory, amid the trumpeting of angels and the rejoicing of saints.

7. Throughout His ministry on earth Jesus depended upon the hospitality of strangers. Here He asked two of His disciples to bring Him an ass and its colt belonging to a complete stranger. It was on this colt (upon which no one had ever sat) that Jesus rode into Jerusalem.
8. By this orchestrated event, Christ was following the Jewish custom for a royal or kingly entry.
9. The Pharisees, filled with envy and malice, tried to stop the crowd shouting praises and hosanna to Jesus. Christ replied that even if they succeeded in silencing the throng, the stones would immediately start shouting His praises. [Show from previous events in the Bible that the stones would have truly praised God:
10. Jesus amidst the triumphant procession revealed His sorrow by weeping over Jerusalem for its continual refusal to accept the gift of salvation God has given her (Matt 23:37-39; Luke 19:41-44).
11. The rulers in Jerusalem came out to disperse the throng following Jesus and stop them from singing His praises thereby signaling their continued, wilful disbelief of Christ's Messiahship.

THE LAST SUPPER

Study: Matt 26:20-29; Mark 14:17-25; Luke 22:7-24; John 13:1-30

A Servant of servants (John 13:1-17)

In the same chapter where the gospel writer Luke narrated the account of the Lord's Supper and the manner

how Christ humbled Himself to the point of taking the place of a servant there also he wrote: "And there was also strife among them (the disciples), which of them should be accounted the greatest" (Luke 22:24). And at this time at such a feast

it was customary for a servant to wash the feet of the guests, and on this occasion preparation had been made for the service. The pitcher, the basin, and the towel were there, in readiness for the feet washing; but no servant was present, and it was the disciples' part to perform it. But each of the disciples, yielding to wounded pride, determined not to act the part of a servant. All manifested a stoical unconcern, seeming unconscious that there was anything for them to do. By their silence they refused to humble themselves.

How was Christ to bring these poor souls where Satan would not gain over them a decided victory? How could He show that a mere profession of discipleship did not make them disciples, or insure them a place in His kingdom? How could He show that it is loving service, true humility, which constitutes real greatness? How was He to kindle love in their hearts, and enable them to comprehend what He longed to tell them?

The disciples made no move toward serving one another. Jesus waited for a time to see what they would do. Then He, the divine Teacher, rose from the table. Laying aside the outer garment that would have impeded His movements, He took a towel, and girded

Himself.... "After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded." This action opened the eyes of the disciples. Bitter shame and humiliation filled their hearts. They understood the unspoken rebuke, and saw themselves in altogether a new light.⁸

Having taught His disciples the practical unspoken lesson, and knowing that they understood what He had just done, He put before them the position of a servant and a master and their duties to one another. John the beloved put it thus:

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (Jn 13:12-17 NIV).

At this point the Messiah, the Creator of the universe, presented Himself as the Servant of servants. His disciples are the servants and He their Master. And to all His future followers He is still telling them that "You know that the

rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25-28 NIV).

In addition, having understood the significance of the action of Christ in the ordinance of foot-washing—a service which humbled their pride; He also taught them the spiritual significance—“the service demanded of them was a self-forgetting ministry of love that places the interests and conveniences of self behind and below those of others.”¹⁰ This spiritual significance could be seen in the threefold significance of the ordinance of foot washing.

The Threefold Significance of the Ordinance of Foot-washing

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary has enumerated three-fold significance of the ordinance of foot-washing that needs our attention:

1. It symbolizes cleansing from sin.... The cleansing from the defilement that have subsequently accrued are symbolized by ordinance of foot washing....the ordinance has no significance whatever unless the participant by repentance and thorough conversion has expelled sin from the life. There is no merit in the act of foot washing itself. Only when there has been the appropriate preliminary preparation does the service assume meaning.

2. It symbolizes a renewed consecration to service. The one who participates stoops to wash the feet of his brethren thereby indicating that he is willing to engage in the service of the Master no matter how humble that service may be
3. It typifies the spirit of Christian fellowship. The ordinance is thus a suitable preparatory service to participation in the Lord's Supper.¹⁰

Purpose and reasons for Christ's humiliating act

1. To teach practical lessons on humility, simplicity, and tolerance.
2. To demonstrate the fact that any true leader must be ready to serve all.
3. To show unconditional love to all His disciples (who would desert Him during His arrest), and specifically to Peter (who would deny Him three times) and Judas (who would betray Him).
4. To demonstrate the blessings of Christian togetherness and unity.

“In remembrance of Me” – The Lord's Supper

The ordinance of foot-washing—which is to be observed by Jesus' followers through all ages until the end of the world—preceded the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, but these two ordinances were instituted by Christ at the Upper Room. But from the outset it should be noted that the emblems of bread and wine used in the Lord's Supper do not transform to the physical body and blood of Christ.

They are symbols commemorating His sacrifice for us. The eating and drinking are expressions of faith in Christ who died for us and who will return according to His promise.

Four Scriptural Names

1. The breaking of bread (Acts 2:42 cr. 20:7). This term does not exclusively refer to the Lord's Supper but to love-feasts.
2. Thanksgiving (1 Cor 10:16 cf. Matt 26:26,27).
3. The Table of the Lord (1 Cor 10:21).
4. The Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:20).

Of the four names mentioned above, the most commonly used by Christians is the Lord's Supper. It was given by Christ beside Baptism as the only two ordinances or sacraments to remind Christians of His death and resurrection and to replace the Passover meal for the Christian church at the eve of the crucifixion (Matt. 26:18-20; Mk 14:12-16; Lk 22:7-13; Jn. 13:1).¹¹

The Wycliffe Bible Dictionary listed some important points as the meaning of the Lord's Supper:

1. Paul the apostle stated that Christ is our Passover, sacrificed for us (1 Cor 5:7); John the Baptist identified Christ as the true Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29) whose broken body and shed blood would be offered for the salvation of the world. When He introduced the bread and wine they are symbols of remembrance of His sacrificial death.

2. It is the fulfillment of the divine covenant of redemption. When taken, it has the significance of a covenant meal in which the two parties had fellowship and pledged their loyalty to each other (Gen 26:28-30; 31:44. 46.54; Ex. 24:1-11). In Christ it is a covenant between Christ and His church (Jer 31:31-34) which was ratified by Christ at the Upper Room.
3. It points at the messianic and eschatological aspects of the Passover. In the Old Testament it pointed at deliverance like that from Egypt (Isa 51:6-16). In the New Testament it points at the Messiah in the person of the paschal meal taking the cup of judgment and salvation which means deliverance for His people. In addition, the meal also pointed at the final messianic banquet (Isa 25:6; Lk 14:15-24) at the consummation of redemption story where the redeemed will have final fellowship with the Lord (Mt 26:29).
4. In John 6, Christ was presented as true bread prefigured by the manna of Moses' time. As Christ gave His life for us, eternal life is by participating in Him (Jn 6: 40, 47, 51-58). This is possible only through the Holy Spirit and by saving faith in response to His word (v. 63).
5. It is the re-enactment in the sign of the reality of Christ's self-offering, offered once and for all giving us the assurance that God Himself has remembered His people in fulfillment of the covenant promised.¹²

GETHSEMANE**Study Matt 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-49**

Gethsemane is a garden located on the Mount of Olive east of the brook Kidron (Jn 18:1). The name Gethsemane is from Aramaic word meaning “oil press.”¹³ Here in this garden the Redeemer of the human race after the Lord's Supper came with His disciples. He asked eight of the disciples to wait as He took three (Peter and the two sons of Zebedee James and John) and went farther up the hill with them; “and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me”. (Matt 26:37, 38). “Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (v. 39 NIV). “It was here that the mysterious cup trembled in Christ's hand. Here the destiny of a lost world hung in the balance. Should he refuse to stand as man's surety? Satan encircled his humanity with a horror of great darkness, tempting him to think that God had forsaken him.”¹⁴

Looking at this scene, one's mind will be filled with questions such as: why was Jesus Christ so sorrowful and very heavy? Why did He leave His disciples falling on His face three times praying to His Father? Why is the Almighty Son of God who worked many miracles, so heavy and disturbed? Why does Jesus Christ who is life Himself and who came to die for the sin of the world seem to be afraid of death? There is only one reasonable answer to these questions and that is “the weight that pressed down our Lord's soul was not the fear of death, and its

pains....But the real weight that bowed down the heart of Jesus was the weight of the sin of the world.”¹⁵

Finally one more passage in the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians throws light to humility of Jesus Christ during His last day of earth more especially His selflessness in the garden of Gethsemane. This passage says “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:5-8).

Christ was not forced to empty Himself but He did that to make the work of redemption for us possible. He is God eternal, equal with God the Father but He chose to take the form of a slave, and one outstanding characteristic of a slave is his or her rendering unquestioning obedience to his or her superior. So as a man Christ rendered obedience to God the Father (Heb. 5:8). His complete life was subordinated to the will of His Father. This is an example He left for us to follow. The question before every human is that “shall we who are so far inferior to Christ stand so much on our frail reputations that we find it difficult or impossible to yield our wills to the will of God?”¹⁶

Lessons from Gethsemane

1. Always ask for God's will to be done in your life at all times.

2. Intercessory prayers are mandatory for believers. Do not be weary in praying for your neighbors.
3. God is so merciful that no matter the circumstances we are passing through, He provides us with the necessary strength and assurance.

CONCLUSION

The last days of life of Jesus Christ on earth were the most exciting days of His earthly ministry. There, at the Upper Room, He had displayed the true character of a servant-leader which the world needs so much. We have seen Him there as the Messiah who came not to be served but to serve those that He came to redeem. Following Him to the Mount of Olive into the Garden of Gethsemane we saw His unwavering submission to God His Father. If we are to follow Christ faithfully step by step through His last days of ministry on earth then we will be partakers of His spirit and when His spirit dwells in us we will then be like Him. It is only then the wishes of Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:5-8 will be fulfilled in us. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

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CHAPTER TWELVE

FROM GETHSEMANE TO THE CROSS

Ikechi C. Ekpendu

Introduction

The momentous events that took place in the life of Jesus from Gethsemane to the cross caught the attention and imagination of those who described them and they are still thought-provoking events to those who seriously reflect on them. These events have not ceased to draw the minds, eye of men and women who profess Christianity or wish to do so.

Jesus had lived in the presence of His Father all His life on earth, constantly guided and supported by the Spirit of God. He always gave God the glory for His works on earth which He attested to in **John 5:30** "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me". Jesus had always spoken with authority, power, and without fear, this is obvious in His actions and statements. (Mt 7:29; Luk. 5:24; John 10:18).

In this period of Jesus' life, the chief priest, the scribes, the elders of the people had conspired to kill Him, (Mt 26:1-5), the woman had anointed His feet at this

time (vs 6-13); Judas Iscariot had sold Him to the high priest and sought opportunity to betray Him (vs 14-16); Jesus had taken the Passover feast (vs 17-26) and had finished the Last supper with His disciples (vs 26-36). When Jesus invited His disciples to the garden of Gethsemane for them to pray, Jesus had always visited the garden for prayer and meditation and rest (Lk. 22:39) but this time was different, Jesus was conversing with His disciples and giving them instruction but as He came close to the garden of Gethsemane, He became unusually silent.¹ The events that took place from Gethsemane to the Cross and their significance to every human life are the foci of this Chapter.

Gethsemane means "olive press", a remote wall garden where Jesus went often for prayer, rest and meditation.² Gethsemane is from an Aramaic word meaning "oil press" which is probably situated on the higher slope of the Mount of Olives directly across the Kidron Valley from the temple.³ In Palestine, the Mount of Olives is one of the highest land marks of about 2640 ft above sea level.⁴

Cross is defined by Chambers dictionary as a gibbet on which the Romans exposed criminals, it consists of two pieces of timber one placed transversely to the other. Originally, it was a wooden pointed stake used to build a wall or to erect a fortification but was latter used to display the heads of the captured foes or of particular heinous criminal on the palisades above the gateway into a city. This was first done by the Assyrians and the Persians. It later became an instrument for capital punishment which

was reserved for the enemy of the state by the Greeks and the Romans. By the 1st Century, it was used for the enemy of the state and later the Romans began to use it as a deterrent to criminal activity and by the time of Jesus, it was a common sight.⁵ The cross became associated with Christianity because Jesus was crucified on the cross.

Crucifixion was a method the Romans used to enforce punishment with the use of the cross, the most painful and degrading form of capital punishment in the ancient world.⁶ It became a means by which Jesus became the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all mankind, a symbol for the sacrifice of self in discipleship (Rom.12:1), and for the death of self to the world (Mk. 8:34).

In the Garden of Gethsemane

At the entrance of the Garden, Jesus left all but 3 of the disciples, Peter, James, and John. He moved into the garden with them and "took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. On getting to a spot, he entreated them, "Stay here and keep watch with me" (Mat. 26:37, 38). Moving a little distance from them he fell to the ground in agony on His face, burdened with all the sins of mankind, He prayed, "O my father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will". The burden of sin laid on Him was so great that His sweat turned to something like blood. In the garden of Gethsemane, Christ suffered for man and the burden of sin He did not commit was upon Him. Speaking on Jesus' experience in the garden White said, Jesus seemed as one

who has lost contact with heaven, counted as one of the sinners, feeling the weight of sin and how terrible the wrath of God against sin was weighing heavily on Him, hence His exclamation "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death".⁶ {DA 685.2} The word translated troubled is from the Greek word *ademoneo*, meaning to be anxious, distressed. Also the word translated sorrow is from the greek word *perilperos*, meaning deeply grieved, expressing mental pain, which hems Him on every side. These expressions suggest that Jesus was passing through an acute emotional pain as He faced this ordeal.⁷

Speaking on the ordeal which Jesus referred to as a bitter cup, Warfield describes this bitter cup as physical suffering, the torture of the scourge and the cross, together with mental anguish of betrayal, denial and desertation.⁸ Three times He came back to check His disciples but found them sleeping. Christ Knew His time of betrayal and arrest had arrived. He prayed asking for divine strength to bear the load. In His mercies, God the Father sent an angel from Heaven to Him in order to condole and strengthen Him (Luke 22: 43, 44).

THE ARREST, TRIAL, AND CALVARY

(Matt. 26: 47 -27: 66; Mark 14: 43-15: 47; Luke 22: 47 -23: 56; John 18: 1 -19: 42)

As soon as Jesus was arrested He was taken to Annas, then to Caiaphas. Annas was the ex-high priest (experienced, cunning and full of evil scheming). Caiaphas was the current high priest in that year. The abuse, ridicule, sufferings, and maltreatment Jesus

received in the hands of the Jews before His condemnation to death were unlawful according to Jewish and Roman laws. But these proved the resentment and hatred the Jews felt towards the Savior. From Caiaphas, Christ was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, to Herod the Tetrarch of Galilee and back to Pilate where He was eventually sentenced to death. One testimony was constantly repeated by the various examiners of Jesus (especially by Pilate and Herod). That was that they found no fault in Him. The charges brought against Him were unproven, and He did not therefore deserve any penalty at all not to talk of a death penalty (John 18:38).

After Jesus had been betrayed with a kiss by Judas and arrested by the mob, Peter out of anger to prevent what he saw a defeat, drew out his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant (Malchus by name – John 18: 10). Although the religious leaders could have arrested Jesus at any time, they came at night because they were afraid of the crowds that followed Him each day (Matt. 26:5).

Nocturnal Trial of Jesus

The trial of Jesus was extremely illegal; His accusers seek some false accusations to sentence Him to death. The religious leaders met in Caiaphas' home urging that there should be a speedy trial and execution before the Sabbath. Christ was falsely tried (Matt. 26: 59-61). Witnesses were hired to testify against Him. He was framed up. He appeared before the Sanhedrin – the most powerful and influential Religio-political body among the Jewish people. After several futile attempts to falsely accuse Jesus

failed, two false witnesses charged that Jesus said, "I am able to destroy this temple of God and build it in three days". (Matt. 26:61). Jesus, however, was talking about His own body and alluding to His resurrection after crucifixion. He was not referring to the literal temple in Jerusalem in His days, which took the Jews 40 years to build (457-408 B.C.). Jesus was charged with blasphemous boasting – He claimed that He could destroy the temple and also called Himself "the son of God". (Matt. 26: 63, 64, 69 ff). Jesus still stood meek and humble before the crowd that was angry. Peter followed Jesus after He was betrayed, he was eager to be a witness to whatever will be done with Jesus, but for fear of his safety, denied Jesus three times that night. His denial became more intense in each of the three stages: First, simple denial and change of subjects; second, denial with an oath; third, denial with curses and swearing. Jesus who was far from Peter at that point sorrowfully looked at him and the words Jesus had spoken to him and his zealous assertions came afresh to his mind "though all men shall be offended because of you, yet I will never be offended" (Matt. 26:33). The look of Jesus to Peter melted his heart and saved him which caused Him to weep, repented of his sin and he became converted.

THE TRIAL OF CHRIST BETWEEN PILATE AND THE ROMAN AUTHORITIES (Matt. 27: 11 -31)

The religious leaders were bent on killing Jesus. So they had to accuse Him of crimes that would inevitably concern the Roman government, such as encouraging the people not to pay taxes, claiming to be a king and causing

riots. These accusations were, however, not true. Pilate recognized that obvious plot against Jesus and wanted to acquit (or release) Him. But he was under intense pressure to keep peace in his territory. He was more concerned about the political expediency than about ethical correctness (doing what is right). He had no good excuse to condemn Jesus but he was afraid of the crowd. Pilate found it difficult to reconcile the irreconcilables between Jesus and Barabbas – a murderer and revolutionary – was set free instead of Christ (Mark 15:7). Pilate could not stand on principle. He was a weak leader. So the people took laws into their hands and compelled Christ to carry His own cross. He suffered shame and reproach for the offence He did not commit (Isaiah 53).

Four Evasions Trials By Pilate.

First, Pilate tried to transfer his responsibility of decision to Herod but sent Jesus back unsentenced. (Lk 23:5-12).

Secondly, he tried half measure, "I will have Him punished and release Him" (Lk 23:16-23). He was thinking that the crowd will be satisfied by something less than the expected sentence.

Thirdly he tried to do the right thing for the wrong reason, remembering the procurator established custom to grant amnesty to some prisoner, he hoped the people could select Jesus for this favor.

Fourthly, he tried to protect his innocence by washing his hand with water before the crowd. (Mt 27:24). It is easy to condemn Pilate, overlook self devious behavior, avoiding the pain of whole hearted commitment and search for convenient subterfuges.

CHRIST BEFORE HEROD (Luke 23: 6 – 12)

Pilate wanted to free himself from the responsibility in Jesus trial and condemnation, he sent Him and His accusers to Herod on hearing that Herod was in Jerusalem. Though the arrest of Jesus took place in Jerusalem, Jesus a Galilean, and Herod Antipas, was a Roman puppet, king of Galilee and Peres (Lk 3:1-2), could hear the case of Jesus and pass sentence. He was convinced that Jesus was innocent and he declined to pass judgment and sent Him back to Pilate. (Lk 23:6-12). The Roman Governor of Judea and Samaria sought various means to release Jesus but it was all in vain, when the Jews threatened to make his conduct known to the Roman Government, he succumbed to their demand. Through the fear of losing his authority and power, Pilate consented to the death of Jesus. And notwithstanding, he placed the death of Jesus upon the multitude and his accusers who received it, crying “His blood be on us and on our children” (Matt 27:25). Pilate was guilty of the blood of Jesus for his selfish interest, love of earthly honor and indecision.

CALVARY AND THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST (Matt. 27: 32-66)

A passerby, Simon of Cyrene, from Northern Africa, was forced to carry Christ's cross when Christ became physically exhausted and powerless to carry the burden any further, He had been weakened by the beatings He received and by His being starved for three days. This was

why Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry His cross to Golgotha. He was dressed in a scarlet robe and a crown of thorns was placed on His head. They parted with His garments (Matt. 27: 35; cf. Ps. 22: 18). Crucified between two robbers, He was mocked at and ridiculed. They spat on Him also –all was borne by Him in order to redeem our souls and cleanse us from sin. (cf. Heb. 9:22).

In Matthew 27: 51, it was recorded that “the veil of the temple was rent into two from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.” The temple had 3 main parts – the courts, the Holy Place (HP) and the Most Holy Place (MHP) (Lev. 16:1-35). The priests alone could enter the Holy place to carry out their daily service duties. But only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place, once a year, to atone for the sins of the nation.

The curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was torn into two at Christ's death, symbolizing that the barrier between God and humanity was removed. No more animal sacrifice was needed. We can now approach God boldly through Christ (Heb. 9:1-14; 10:19-24). Joseph of Arimathea – secret disciple of Jesus who was also a religious leader and an honored member of the Sanhedrin – gave Jesus a befitting burial. He laid Christ's body in the tomb he had carved out for Himself (Matt. 27:57, 58; Mark 15:43).

The crucifixion of Jesus was predicted by Jesus himself many times, at least three of such predictions were listed by the synoptic gospels (Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34) while the book of John records three others (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-33). Such recordings are not without significance

Significance of the Prediction

The crucifixion occurred by divine necessity

It emphasized the guilt of both Jewish and Roman leaders.

It will bring about the vindication of Jesus by being raised from the dead.

The death of Jesus entails glory and exaltation.

Truths Enforced by the Cross

First, the gravity of man's sin has been revealed by the cross, as it is our greed, envy, cowardice that sent Jesus to the cross which He resolved to bear in love and mercy to take them away.

Secondly, it revealed how wonderful and beyond comprehension the Love of God for man is, as He bore our sin, guilt and judgment.

Thirdly, Salvation given by Christ must not be sold; it must be a free gift. He purchased it for us at the highest price of His own blood.

FOUR MIRACULOUS EVENTS THAT ACCOMPANIED CHRIST'S DEATH

Darkness (Matt. 27:45)

The tearing in two of the curtain in the temple (Matt. 27:51a)

An earthquake (Matt. 27:51b)

Resurrection of dead people from their tombs and their appearing to many people (Matt. 27: 52, 53)

Christ's death evidently was not unnoticed. It shook the whole world. Everyone knew something significant had happened in the history of humanity and the world.

THE WORDS OF JESUS ON THE CROSS (Matt. 27: 46; 15: 34; Luke 23: 34, 43, 46)

(Matt. 27: 46; 15: 34; Luke 23: 34, 43, 46)

1. "Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani" (Matt. 27: 46; cf. Psalms 22:1)
2. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". (Luke 23: 34)
3. "Verily, I say unto thee, today; thou shalt be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23: 43; cf John 20:17)
4. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23: 46)
5. "It is finished" (John 19: 30)
6. "Woman, behold your son; son, behold your mother". (John 19: 26, 27)
7. "I am thirsty" (John 19: 28b)

The Values and Lessons to be learnt from Gethsemane to the Cross**Forgiveness**

The denial of Jesus by Peter would have been a case in point where forgiveness would not be possible any more, but Jesus at that moment showed forgiveness to Peter. Man needs to understand the atonement made by Jesus for our sins, he taught that the situations where it looks impossible for one to be forgiven can also be forgiven and the obligation of one who has been forgiven by God should be to forgive one another; this Jesus taught in our Lord's prayer and practiced towards the time Peter denied Him (Mat. 6:12-15).

The Weight of Sin

The death of Jesus on the cross was caused by the sin of Humanity. Sin is hostility to God (Rom.8:7), and to commit sin is to be lawless (1 Jn. 3:4), this is an act of offending our creator and putting our dependence on ourselves. We should always understand that the weight of sin is an outright rebellion against God; hence David's prayer when he realized his sins should be our prayer (Ps 51).

Salvation for Mankind

It was for the perfection of His love and the proof of His interest in sinful human that made God send His only son to die for the sin of man (Jn 3:16). God sent His son to be a propitiation for our sin, (Rom.3:24,25), and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). This involves reconciling man to God. Once one is reconciled to God, it means that man has peace with Him and is justified. (cf. Jn. 1: 12-13; 1 Jn. 3:1-10, Rom. 5:1).

Self Denial

The death of Christ clearly shows to man that Jesus completely gave Himself on our behalf. We need to live a life of self denial, which He invites us to live "if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and follow me" (Mk. 8:34).

No Need for Violence

There is no need to be violent in life but through total submission and faith in God, we can win our battles.

There is Need for Prayer

Jesus Prayer was not a prayer of defeat but a prayer of victory because victory can only come when we trust in the Lord.

Do Not Betray One Another

Betraying one another in life will not make for any growth, spiritually, physically, or financially, we should rather live a life of trust.

Summary

The entrance of sin into the world brought about the plan of salvation which is clearly shown from the events that happened from Gethsemane to the cross. These events from the time of His prayers in the garden to His betrayal by one of His disciples. For want of every reason to kill Jesus, his trials were nocturnal and all the sufferings of Christ were to redeem man from the eternal death giving man the opportunity for eternal life through Christ Jesus. The events in the life of Christ from Gethsemane to Calvary should always be remembered and help guard our thought and action.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE RESURRECTION AND APPEARANCES OF JESUS

Harriet O. Ikhane

Jesus died on the cross at about the time of the evening sacrifice on Friday afternoon. His body was buried in Joseph of Arimathea's new tomb. Those who had opposed Jesus and even some of his disciples believed that this was the end of Jesus' story.¹ The next morning that is, the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders remembered that while Jesus was still alive he said 'After three days I will rise again.' And thinking that his disciples might steal his body, they went to Pilate and asked that the tomb be sealed. The tomb was sealed and a guard posted to ensure its maximum security (Mat. 27:62-66). Were these sufficient enough to prevent Christ from resurrecting from the grave? Are there evidences that prove that our Lord is alive again? What about his appearances, could these be to authenticate his resurrection? All these will be discussed in this segment.

THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection story is recorded in the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Each of the

gospel writers provides so brief account of the events of the resurrection morning, so the exact order of events at the tomb is difficult to ascertain.²

MATTHEW'S ACCOUNT OF THE RESURRECTION

Matthew 28:1-7: "Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightening, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you'" (NKJV).

After the Sabbath, the women came to see the tomb of Jesus probably to weep over him again. But to their greatest surprise the stone at the entrance of the tomb had been rolled away, and an angel whose countenance was like lightening sat on it. This created fear in them but the angel told the women not to be afraid for Christ whom they seek is risen and he instructed them to go quickly and inform the disciples that Jesus is risen from the dead and

He would meet them in Galilee, the place of new beginnings and fruitful ministry (26:32). That is where he would give them a new commission to launch their own part in his continuing mission to the world.³

MARK'S ACCOUNT OF THE RESURRECTION

Mark 16:1-6 "Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, that they might come and anoint him. Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, "who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?' But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away-for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples - and Peter - that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you" (NKJV).

After the burial of Jesus on the preparation day known as Friday, that is, the day before the Sabbath (Saturday), as soon as that stillness was over, at the earliest possible moment, the women were at the tomb. They were wondering how ever they would remove the stone, when, lo and behold, they saw that it had already been removed.⁴

At the tomb, they were told by a young man dressed in white robe that Christ has risen from the grave and he showed them where the body of Christ had been laid. His words were spoken to calm the fear of these first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. The women confirmed that the body had not been stolen and supported the visual evidence of the empty tomb (cf. Mat 28:12-15). The angel reminded them of Jesus' earlier predictions of his resurrection and his promise that he would precede the disciples to Galilee (16:7; cf. 14:28).⁵ The women fled from the tomb trembling and bewildered saying nothing as they ran (16:8).

LUKE'S ACCOUNT OF THE RESURRECTION

Luke 24:1-7 "Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened as they were greatly perplexed about this that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again'" (NKJV).

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women (24:10) came very early in the morning after the Sabbath with spices to apply on the body of Jesus. But they found the stone rolled away from the door of the tomb. Entering the tomb, they did not see the body of Jesus and became afraid that something had happened to Jesus' body. In the midst of their perplexity, they were informed by two men in shining robes about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the men also reminded them about the words of Jesus concerning His resurrection. The women remembered Christ's words and they returned from the tomb and told all that had happened to the eleven disciples and to all the rest.

JOHN'S ACCOUNT OF THE RESURRECTION

John 20:1-10, "Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head,

not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again to their own homes" (NKJV).

When Peter and the beloved disciple reach the tomb, they see the linen cloths lying there and the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head folded up by itself, separate from the linen. The body is simply no longer there to fill the wrappings. The beloved disciple, not Peter, realized the significance of what they saw and "believed" (20:8). This adds further significance to his witness (19:34-35). He is the source of information recorded in the Fourth Gospel (21:24), and his witness is extremely important.⁶ The guarded but empty tomb, with the grave clothes left behind in an orderly manner (John. 20:6-9), convinced John of the resurrection and confirms that no-one had simply moved or stolen the body of Jesus.⁷

DIVERGENCE IN THE FOUR GOSPELS' ACCOUNTS ON THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

There are several significant differences between the four accounts of Jesus' resurrection. These make it impossible to weave a wholly consistent picture of what happened: any such picture will involve some dubious speculation.

In order to reconcile all four Gospel accounts of the women's actions, we need to focus first on the earliest Resurrection Sunday appearances. Matthew 28, Mark 16,

Luke 24, and John 20 each opens with the arrival of the women (including Mary Magdalene) at the tomb. On Sunday morning the women came to the tomb with spices probably to prepare the body for permanent burial,⁸ or perhaps because the burial on Friday might have been hurried in order to be completed before the beginning of the Sabbath.⁹ As the group of women approached the tomb, there was an earthquake and an angel of the Lord came, moved the stone and then sat on it (Mat. 28:1-2).¹⁰ The stone was rolled aside, not so that Jesus could come out-He had already departed-but so that the women and later the disciples could see the emptiness of the tomb.¹¹

The apparent discrepancy between Mark and Luke, who say the women, came just after the sun had risen, and John, who says Mary Magdalene came while it was still dark, then Matthew using a complicated construction that probably means much the same¹² is exactly what one would expect from independent accounts of the same event and shows the story of Jesus' resurrection is not the result of collusion.¹³ Two angels in human form announced the Resurrection to the women. Mark and Matthew mention only one. The women still did not believe Jesus had risen from the dead, but thought His body had been stolen, John 20:1-2 tells us that Mary Magdalene told the disciples that the Lord's body was missing. Their report of an empty tomb seemed to the male disciples to be women's idle chatter. (Luke 24:11).¹⁴

After Peter and John viewed the empty tomb and departed, Mary Magdalene remained behind weeping, she saw the angels in the tomb, asked about the missing body, and then had her own conversation with Jesus Himself. In John 20:17, Jesus sent her off to tell His brethren that He is alive, and verse 18 states that she obeyed. Mark 16:9-11

adds that Mary Magdalene was the first to whom the Lord appeared and that the disciples did not believe her story. Meanwhile, the other women, finding the stone rolled away, entered the tomb and saw an angel sitting on the right. Suddenly they realized there were two angels, as Luke recorded. Matthew and Mark just mention one of them, perhaps focusing on the one who was speaking (Matthew 28:5-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:4-8). The angel tells the women to go tell the disciples and Peter—alluding to the estrangement of Peter after his denial and suggesting he was not with the larger group—that Jesus was risen and would see them in Galilee.

Matthew 28:8-10 states that the women took off running to find the disciples. They may have just missed Peter and John, who were on their way to the tomb. Evidently while these women were on the way to find the disciples in the city, Peter and John viewed the empty tomb, and Mary Magdalene had her encounter with Jesus. After appearing to Mary Magdalene, Jesus visited the women who were running to the city, and He reinforced the message that they should go tell His brethren that they would see Him in Galilee. Perhaps Jesus made this personal appearance because they were so terribly afraid and too fearful to speak to anyone (Mark 16:8). After He met them, they joyfully delivered the message. Luke 24:9-11 summarizes the fact that “the eleven and all the rest” ultimately heard about Christ's Resurrection from all the women, including Mary Magdalene. Yet no one believed them.

These divergences in detail found in the accounts of the resurrection, shows the independence and excitement of the witnesses. Therefore, discrepancies in the accounts

of the resurrection of Jesus cannot be used as evidence to prove that the resurrection did not take place.¹⁵

EVIDENCE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION

The earliest documentary evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is found in 1 Corinthians 15: 3ff where Paul, writing about A.D. 55, reminds the Corinthians of the Church 'tradition' which he had 'received,' presumably after his conversion (A.D. 33)¹⁶

One evidence of Christ's resurrection was that, He, Himself predicted His resurrection - “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day” (Mat. 16:21). Even though the disciples did not understand what Jesus was telling them at that time, they remembered his words and recorded them (Lk. 24: 6-8). The testimony of the Roman guard (Mat. 28:11) as well as, the announcement of the angels at the tomb (vs. 4-7), and the testimony of those resurrected with Christ (Mat. 27:52, 53) were evidence of his resurrection.¹⁷ The ten post-resurrection appearances of Jesus are a stronger evidence of his resurrection. Five of these appearances took place on the day of resurrection while additional five appearances came later.¹⁸ Scripture records that Jesus was seen by more than 500 at one time.¹⁹ The unrelenting faith of the disciples is a strong indirect evidence for the resurrection of Christ. This group of disciples, who were once very afraid and dispirited that they deserted Christ, now became a valiant band of apostles ready to do and dare for their Lord. The resurrection became one of their main themes, as their

sermons reveal (Acts 2:32; 3:14, 15; 4:11; 10:40-42; 13:30-35).²⁰

The growth of the Christian church confirms the resurrection. Peter's first sermon which dealt with the resurrection of Jesus, stirred people to receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour (Acts 2:41). And that group of believers has multiplied until now it reaches around the world. Testimony of hundreds of millions of transformed lives through the centuries shows the power of the resurrection. The most conclusive proof of the resurrection of Jesus is that he is living within the believers today in all of his resurrected life and transforming power.²¹

The evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is overwhelming. Nothing in history is more certain than that the disciples believed that, after being crucified, dead, and buried, Christ rose again from the tomb on the third day, and that at intervals thereafter he met and conversed with them.²²

IMPORTANCE/SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus is important for several reasons: First, it witnesses to the immense power of God Himself. To believe in the resurrection is to believe in God—His existence, His creative power and His power to raise the dead. Only He who created life can resurrect it after death, only He can reverse the hideousness that is death itself, and only He can remove the sting that is death and the victory that is the grave's (1 Cor. 15:54-55).²³ In resurrecting Jesus from the grave, God reminds us of His absolute sovereignty over life and death.

The resurrection proved that Jesus was divine, “and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). It proved Jesus' power to forgive sins, “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Cor. 15:17). By rising from the dead, Jesus proved his authority and power to break the bonds of sin and to assure forgiveness and eternal life to all who accept his gift of salvation.

The resurrection tells the world that the Kingdom of God is ruled by a living sovereign. Founders of other religion are dead and their bones lie dormant on the earth, but the founder of Christianity—sixty years after his death—appeared to John in the Island of Patmos and said, “I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen (Rev. 1:17,18). It revealed Christ's power over death, “Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him” (Rom 6:9). The resurrection secured our victory over death as well and “raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6).

The resurrection defeated God's enemy, Satan. Satan must have thought he had dealt the final and decisive blow in this age-old war. But this was the devil's most serious miscalculation. The Cross was heaven's triumph.²⁴ And when Christ who is depicted as the Lamb that was slain, but standing again (Rev. 5:6), the power of sin and death was forever shattered. Because of the Resurrection, Christians too will overcome as a result of the Lamb's sacrifice and victory over death (cf. Rev. 12:11).²⁴ The resurrection of Jesus is important to salvation because it

demonstrated that God accepted Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf.

The resurrection of Jesus is a testimony to the resurrection of human beings which is the basic tenet of the Christian faith. Paul explains in detail the importance of the resurrection of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15. Some in Corinth did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, and Paul then gives six disastrous consequences if there were no resurrection: our preaching Christ will be useless (v. 14); our faith also useless (v. 14); we will be seen as false witnesses and preachers of the resurrection (v. 15); no one would be redeemed from sin (v. 17); all believers who were dead in Christ would have perished (v. 18); and Christians would be the most miserable people on the earth (v. 19). But Christ indeed had risen from the dead and "has become the first-fruit of those who have fallen asleep (v. 20), assuring that we will follow Him in resurrection (1 Thess. 4: 13-18). This shows that physical death is not the termination of human existence, for God who is the giver of life (1 Timothy 6:13) has the power to reanimate the human body.²⁶

APPEARANCES OF JESUS

The resurrection of Jesus was never a philosophical abstraction unconnected to history; it was rather a historical event.²⁷ Seventh-day Adventists also believe that the resurrection of Jesus from the grave is a literal historical fact,²⁸ the results of which were witnessed to by the ten post-resurrection appearances of Jesus recorded in Scripture. Five of these took place on the day of the resurrection – to Mary Magdalene (Jn. 20:11-18), to the

other women (Mat. 28:8-10), to Simon Peter (Lk. 24:33-35; 1 Cor. 15:5), to Cleopas and a companion on the way to Emmaus (Lk 28:33-34), and to the ten disciples in Jerusalem (Jn. 20:19-31). The additional five appearances came later – to the eleven disciples in Jerusalem (Jn. 20:26-28), to the seven by the Sea of Galilee (Jn. 21:1-23), to more than five hundred on a mountain in Galilee (Mat. 28:16-20; 1 Cor. 15:6), to James (1 Cor. 15:7), to the eleven in Jerusalem and Bethany (Lk. 24:44-49).²⁹ He "showed himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3, KJV). He appeared to the apostles over a period of forty days, instructing them about the kingdom of God. He then ascended from Mount Olivet, near Jerusalem, while the apostles watched (Acts 1:9-12). Efforts to prevent the resurrection and to circulate a false report concerning it (Mat. 27:62-66) served only to provide additional confirmation of it as a historical fact.³⁰

HIS APPEARANCES ACCORDING TO MARK

When Jesus had risen, early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven demons. She went and told Jesus' companions who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe (16:9-11). After that, Jesus appeared in another form to two of them while they were walking in the country. The description of Jesus as appearing *in another form* is likely because the two disciples did not recognize him at first.³¹ The two returned and reported it to the rest, but they did not also believe. Later, Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating and he rebuked

them for their lack of faith and stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen (vs 12-14).

HIS APPEARANCES ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

Matthew 28 describes the empty tomb and records an appearance of the risen Lord to the women fleeing from the tomb (28:9,10). While the women were on their way, some of the guards reported all that had happened to the chief priests and *the Sanhedrin bribed the soldiers who had guarded the tomb to spread the rumor that the disciples of Jesus had stolen away His body while they slept. Since failure at guard duty could carry the death penalty for Roman soldiers, the Sanhedrin also promised to appease the governor should he hear that the soldiers had slept on guard duty. (Mat. 28:11-15).*³² In so doing they confirmed for all of history that the tomb was really empty.

The events described in the remaining verses in *Matthew 28* did not occur on that Sunday. *Matthew 28:16* reveals that the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go and there Jesus appeared to them. Though Matthew follows Mark in the story of the empty tomb, he has embellished it with the story of the guard and with references to an earthquake and a descending angel.³³

HIS APPEARANCES ACCORDING TO LUKE

Luke 24 relates how the women, after finding the tomb empty, brought the news to the eleven and all the rest but they did not believe them (24:1-8). Luke records three appearances: one to Cleopas and another on the road to Emmaus, conversing about all the things that had

happened and Jesus joined in the discussion but they did not know it was him. They later knew when they sat for meal (24:13-32); second to Peter (24:34) this appearance was not fully recorded in the Gospels, Paul however, mentions it in 1 Corinthians 15:5 "He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve"³⁴; and then he appeared to the Eleven and others in Jerusalem showing them evidence that he was not a ghost (24:36-49).³⁵

HIS APPEARANCES ACCORDING TO JOHN

John 20; 21 relate how Mary Magdalene found the tomb empty and how Peter and the beloved disciple visited the tomb to confirm her news (20:1-18). John records four appearances: first to Mary Magdalene in the garden on the morning of the first day of the week, Sunday 16th Nisan;³⁶ second to ten disciples on the same Sunday evening behind closed doors in Jerusalem (Jn. 20:19-23). The reason the doors were locked was fear of the Jews, but the function of the locked doors is to stress the miraculous nature of Jesus' appearance amongst His followers.³⁷ Then to ten disciples and Thomas a week later (20:26-29). Thomas was unconvinced about the information of what the disciples have seen; he needed both personal and concrete evidence that Jesus had been raised from the dead.³⁸ Jesus had to appear again to remove all possible grounds for unbelief. He then appeared to seven disciples by the *Sea of Tiberias also known as the Sea of Galilee. Peter and six other disciples decided to fish all night but their efforts failed. When Jesus instructed them early the next morning to cast their net on the right side of the boat, John recognized Him. Peter immediately put on his outer cloak over his inner cloak and plunging into the*

*water he swam about a hundred yards to shore. There Jesus was already cooking fish on a fire of coals and had a supply of bread ready (21:1-14).*³⁹

Jesus met with a group of disciples on the very evening of the resurrection day, but in Jerusalem rather than in Galilee.⁴⁰ When He appeared to his disciples in the locked room (Jn. 20:19-23), he imparts to them the promised Holy Spirit.⁴¹ To prove his identity and demonstrate that he was not an apparition Jesus showed them his hands and his side.⁴² Although Jesus tells Mary not to touch him in Jn. 20:17, *since he has not yet returned to the Father*, in 20:27 he instructs Thomas to touch his hands and side. He also asked for food and eat a piece of broiled fish in their presence (Lk. 24:42,43). He left them in no doubt that his was a true resurrection.

The repeated post-resurrection appearances of Jesus were designed to convince the disciples and others of the reality of the resurrection, to give them the opportunity to become familiar with their Master in His glorified body, and to enable Jesus to prepare them for the task of proclaiming the good news of salvation to the world.⁴³

CONCLUSION

Without the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the whole basics of Christian faith will collapse. Since Jesus did rise, there is hope for Christians living and a guarantee that there will be resurrection and eternal life for those who believe in him.

The disciples' certainty of the resurrection of Christ was based upon the appearances of their risen Lord, and not upon the empty tomb. The last charge Jesus gave to his disciples before his ascension was that of the Great

Commission, the command to evangelize the nations. He promised to be with his disciples "to the end of the world:" (Mat. 28:20), pointing to the Second Advent. *After a post-resurrection ministry of forty days, Jesus ascended back to heaven with hands upraised in a priestly benediction.*

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