

References for *Life and Ministry Meeting Workbook*

FEBRUARY 5-11

TREASURES FROM GOD'S WORD | MATTHEW 12-13

"The Illustration of the Wheat and the Weeds"

(Matthew 13:24-26) He presented another illustration to them, saying: "The Kingdom of the heavens may be likened to a man who sowed fine seed in his field. ²⁵ While men were sleeping, his enemy came and oversowed weeds in among the wheat and left. ²⁶ When the stalk sprouted and produced fruit, then the weeds also appeared.

w13 7/15 9-10 ¶2-3

"Look! I Am With You All the Days"

² The events taking place in that farmer's field illustrate how and when Jesus would gather out of mankind the entire wheat class—anointed Christians who will rule with him in his Kingdom. The sowing began at Pentecost 33 C.E. The gathering will be complete when the anointed who are alive at the end of this system of things receive their final sealing and then are taken to heaven. (Matt. 24:31; Rev. 7:1-4) Just as a lookout point on a mountain provides a person with a sweeping view of his surroundings, so this parable gives us a panoramic view of developments that would occur during a period of some 2,000 years. From our vantage point, what developments related to the Kingdom do we discern? The parable describes a time of sowing, growth, and harvesting. This article will focus mainly on the harvesttime.

UNDER JESUS' WATCHFUL CARE

³ At the dawn of the second century C.E., "the weeds appeared" when imitation Christians became visible in the world field. (Matt. 13:26) By the fourth century, weedlike Christians had greatly outnumbered anointed Christians. Recall that in the parable, the slaves asked their mas-

ter for permission to uproot the weeds. (Matt. 13:28) How did the master respond?

(Matthew 13:27-29) So the slaves of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow fine seed in your field? How, then, does it have weeds?' ²⁸ He said to them, 'An enemy, a man, did this.' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go out and collect them?' ²⁹ He said, 'No, for fear that while collecting the weeds, you uproot the wheat with them.

w13 7/15 10 ¶4

"Look! I Am With You All the Days"

⁴ Speaking about the wheat and the weeds, Jesus said: "Let both grow together until the harvest." This command reveals that from the first century until today, there have always been some anointed wheatlike Christians on earth. That conclusion is confirmed by what Jesus later told his disciples: "I am with you *all* the days until the conclusion of the system of things." (Matt. 28:20) So anointed Christians would be protected by Jesus all the days leading up to the time of the end. However, since they were overgrown by weedlike Christians, we do not know for certain who belonged to the wheat class during that long period of time. However, some decades before the start of the harvest season, the wheat class became discernible. How did that come about?

(Matthew 13:30) Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the harvest season, I will tell the reapers: First collect the weeds and bind them in bundles to burn them up; then gather the wheat into my storehouse.'

w13 7/15 12 ¶10-12

"Look! I Am With You All the Days"

¹⁰ First, **collecting the weeds.** Jesus says: "In the harvest season I will tell the reapers, First

collect the weeds and bind them in bundles.” After 1914, the angels began to “collect” weedlike Christians by separating them from the anointed “sons of the kingdom.”—Matt. 13:30, 38, 41.

¹¹As the collecting work progressed, the distinction between the two groups became ever clearer. (Rev. 18:1, 4) By 1919, it became evident that Babylon the Great had fallen. What especially set true Christians apart from imitation ones? The preaching work. Those taking the lead among the Bible Students began to stress the importance of sharing personally in the Kingdom preaching work. For instance, *To Whom the Work Is Entrusted*, a pamphlet published in 1919, urged *all* anointed Christians to preach from house to house. It stated: “The work appears stupendous, but it is the Lord’s, and in his strength we will perform it. You have the privilege of sharing in it.” What was the response? From that time onward, reported *The Watch Tower* in 1922, the Bible Students stepped up their preaching activities. Before long, preaching from house to house became a hallmark of those faithful Christians—as it is till this day.

¹²Second, **gathering the wheat**. Jesus commands his angels: “Go to gathering the wheat into my storehouse.” (Matt. 13:30) Since 1919, anointed ones have been gathered into the restored Christian congregation. For those anointed Christians who will be alive at the end of this system of things, the final gathering will take place when they receive their heavenly reward.—Dan. 7:18, 22, 27.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

(Matthew 12:20) No bruised reed will he crush, and no smoldering wick will he extinguish, until he brings justice with success.

nwtsty study note on Mt 12:20

smoldering wick: A common household lamp was a small earthenware vessel filled with olive oil. A flax wick drew the oil up to feed the flame.

The Greek expression “smoldering wick” may refer to a wick that gives off smoke because an ember is still present but the flame is fading or is extinguished. The prophecy of Isa 42:3 foretold Jesus’ compassion; he would never extinguish the last spark of hope in humble and downtrodden people.

(Matthew 13:25) While men were sleeping, his enemy came and oversowed weeds in among the wheat and left.

w16.10 32

Did You Know?

Is it believable that in ancient times someone would actually oversow another man’s field with weeds?

AT MATTHEW 13:24-26, Jesus is quoted as saying: “The Kingdom of the heavens may be likened to a man who sowed fine seed in his field. While men were sleeping, his enemy came and oversowed weeds in among the wheat and left. When the stalk sprouted and produced fruit, then the weeds also appeared.” Different writers have questioned whether this illustration should be considered real, yet ancient Roman legal writings suggest that it should.

“Sowing darnel in a field for purposes of revenge . . . was a crime under Roman legislation. The necessity for a law on the subject suggests that the action was not infrequent,” says one Bible dictionary. Legal scholar Alastair Kerr explains that in 533 C.E., Roman Emperor Justinian published his *Digest*, a summary of Roman law and excerpts from jurists of the classical period of the law (about 100-250 C.E.). According to this work (*Digest*, 9.2.27.14), the jurist Ulpian referred to a case considered by the second-century Roman statesman Celsus. Weeds had been sown in another person’s field, and as a result, a crop was ruined. The *Digest* considers the legal remedies available to the owner, or tenant farmer, in order to obtain compensation from the perpetrator for the loss suffered.

That such malicious mischief occurred within the Roman Empire in ancient times indicates that the situation Jesus described was true to life.

Bible Reading

(Matthew 12:1-21) At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples got hungry and started to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ² At seeing this, the Pharisees said to him: “Look! Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” ³ He said to them: “Have you not read what David did when he and the men with him were hungry? ⁴ How he entered into the house of God and they ate the loaves of presentation, something that it was not lawful for him or those with him to eat, but for the priests only? ⁵ Or have you not read in the Law that on the Sabbaths the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath and continue guiltless? ⁶ But I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ However, if you had understood what this means, ‘I want mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless ones. ⁸ For the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath.” ⁹ After departing from that place, he went into their synagogue, ¹⁰ and look! there was a man with a withered hand! So they asked him, “Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath?” so that they might accuse him. ¹¹ He said to them: “If you have one sheep and that sheep falls into a pit on the Sabbath, is there a man among you who will not grab hold of it and lift it out? ¹² How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do a fine thing on the Sabbath.” ¹³ Then he said to the man: “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and it was restored sound like the other hand. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁵ Having come to know this, Jesus departed from there. Many also followed him,

and he cured them all, ¹⁶ but he sternly ordered them not to make him known, ¹⁷ in order to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, who said: ¹⁸ “Look! My servant whom I chose, my beloved, whom I have approved! I will put my spirit upon him, and what justice is he will make clear to the nations. ¹⁹ He will not quarrel nor cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the main streets. ²⁰ No bruised reed will he crush, and no smoldering wick will he extinguish, until he brings justice with success. ²¹ Indeed, in his name nations will hope.”

FEBRUARY 12-18

TREASURES FROM GOD’S WORD | MATTHEW 14-15

“Feeding Many Through the Hands of a Few”

(Matthew 14:16, 17) However, Jesus said to them: “They do not have to leave; you give them something to eat.” ¹⁷ They said to him: “We have nothing here except five loaves and two fish.”

w13 7/15 15 ¶2

Feeding Many Through the Hands of a Few

² Upon seeing the crowd, Jesus is moved with pity for the people, so he heals the sick among them and teaches them many things about God’s Kingdom. When it gets late, the disciples urge Jesus to dismiss the people so that they might go to nearby villages and buy some food for themselves. But Jesus tells his disciples: “You give them something to eat.” His words must seem puzzling to them, for the provisions at hand are meager at best—five loaves and two small fish.

(Matthew 14:18, 19) He said: “Bring them here to me.” ¹⁹ And he instructed the crowds to recline on the grass. Then he took the five loaves and two fish, and looking up to

heaven, he said a blessing, and after breaking the loaves, he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

w13 7/15 15 ¶3

Feeding Many Through the Hands of a Few

³ Moved by compassion, Jesus performs a miracle—the only miracle that is recorded by all four Gospel writers. (Mark 6:35-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13) Jesus has his disciples tell the crowd to recline on the green grass in groups of 50 and of 100. After saying a blessing, he begins breaking the bread and dividing up the fish. Then, rather than giving the food to the people directly, Jesus distributes it “to the disciples, the disciples in turn to the crowds.” Miraculously, there is more than enough for everyone to eat! Just think: Jesus has fed thousands through the hands of a few—his disciples.

(Matthew 14:20, 21) So they all ate and were satisfied, and they took up the leftover fragments, 12 baskets full. ²¹ Now those eating were about 5,000 men, as well as women and young children.

nwtsty study note on Mt 14:21

as well as women and young children: Only Matthew mentions the women and the young children when reporting this miracle. It is possible that the total number of those miraculously fed was well over 15,000.

w13 7/15 15 ¶1

Feeding Many Through the Hands of a Few

IMAGINE the scene. **(Read Matthew 14:14-21.)** It is just before the Passover of 32 C.E. A crowd of some 5,000 men, besides women and young children, are with Jesus and his disciples at a deserted place in the vicinity of Bethsaida, a village on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

(Matthew 15:7-9) You hypocrites, Isaiah aptly prophesied about you when he said: ⁸ ‘This

people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far removed from me. ⁹ It is in vain that they keep worshipping me, for they teach commands of men as doctrines.’”

nwtsty study note on Mt 15:7

hypocrites: The Greek word *hy-po-kri-tes*’ originally referred to Greek (and later Roman) stage actors who wore large masks designed to amplify the voice. The term came to be used in a metaphoric sense to apply to anyone hiding his real intentions or personality by playing false or putting on a pretense. Jesus here calls the Jewish religious leaders “hypocrites.”—Mt 6:5, 16.

(Matthew 15:26) In answer he said: “It is not right to take the bread of the children and throw it to the little dogs.”

nwtsty study note on Mt 15:26

children . . . little dogs: Since dogs were unclean according to the Mosaic Law, the Scriptures often use the term in a derogatory sense. (Le 11:27; Mt 7:6; Php 3:2; Re 22:15) However, in both Mark’s account (7:27) and Matthew’s account of Jesus’ conversation, the diminutive form of the term meaning “little dog” or “house dog” is used, softening the comparison. Perhaps this indicates that Jesus was suggesting an affectionate term for household pets in non-Jewish homes. By likening Israelites to “children” and non-Jews to “little dogs,” Jesus evidently wanted to indicate an order of priority. In a household that had both children and dogs, the children would be fed first.

Bible Reading

(Matthew 15:1-20) Then there came to Jesus from Jerusalem Pharisees and scribes, saying: ² “Why do your disciples overstep the tradition of the men of former times? For example, they do not wash their hands when about to eat a meal.” ³ In reply he said to them: “Why do you overstep the command-

ment of God because of your tradition? ⁴ For example, God said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Let the one who speaks abusively of his father or mother be put to death.’ ⁵ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother: “Whatever I have that could benefit you is a gift dedicated to God,” ⁶ he need not honor his father at all.’ So you have made the word of God invalid because of your tradition. ⁷ You hypocrites, Isaiah aptly prophesied about you when he said: ⁸ ‘This people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far removed from me. ⁹ It is in vain that they keep worshipping me, for they teach commands of men as doctrines.’” ¹⁰ With that he called the crowd near and said to them: “Listen and get the sense of it: ¹¹ It is not what enters into a man’s mouth that defiles him, but it is what comes out of his mouth that defiles him.” ¹² Then the disciples came and said to him: “Do you know that the Pharisees were stumbled at hearing what you said?” ¹³ In reply he said: “Every plant that my heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted. ¹⁴ Let them be. Blind guides is what they are. If, then, a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” ¹⁵ Peter responded: “Make the illustration plain to us.” ¹⁶ At this he said: “Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷ Are you not aware that whatever enters into the mouth passes through the stomach and is discharged into the sewer? ¹⁸ However, whatever comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and those things defile a man. ¹⁹ For example, out of the heart come wicked reasonings, murders, adulteries, sexual immorality, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies. ²⁰ These are the things that defile a man; but to take a meal with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”

FEBRUARY 19-25

TREASURES FROM GOD’S WORD | MATTHEW 16-17

“Whose Thoughts Are You Thinking?”

(Matthew 16:21, 22) From that time forward, Jesus began explaining 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 on the third day be raised up. ²² At this Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying: “Be kind to yourself, Lord; you will not have this happen to you at all.”

w07 2/15 16 ¶17

Husbands—Recognize Christ’s Headship

¹⁷ On another occasion, Jesus explained to his apostles that he must go to Jerusalem, where he would be persecuted by “the older men and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised up.” At this Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, saying: “Be kind to yourself, Lord; you will not have this destiny at all.” Clearly, Peter’s view had been blurred by sentimentality. Correction was in order. So Jesus said to him: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, because you think, not God’s thoughts, but those of men.”—Matthew 16:21-23.

(Matthew 16:23) But turning his back, he said to Peter: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, because you think, not God’s thoughts, but those of men.”

w15 5/15 13 ¶16-17

Be Watchful—Satan Wants to Devour You!

¹⁶ Satan can fool even zealous servants of Jehovah. For example, consider what happened when Jesus told his disciples that he was about to be killed. No doubt with good motive, the apostle Peter took him aside and said: “Be kind to yourself, Lord; you will not have this happen

to you at all.” Jesus’ reply to Peter was firm: “Get behind me, Satan!” (Matt. 16:22, 23) Why did Jesus call Peter “Satan”? Because Jesus understood what was about to happen. The hour approached when he would die as a ransom sacrifice and prove the Devil a liar. At that critical juncture in human history, it was not a time for Jesus to “be kind” to himself. Relaxing his guard would have been precisely what Satan wanted him to do.

¹⁷As we near the end of this system of things, we too are living in critical times. Satan wants us to relax our guard, to “be kind” to ourselves by carving out a niche in this world, thus losing our sense of urgency. Do not let that happen to you! Instead, “keep on the watch.” (Matt. 24:42) Never believe Satan’s deceptive propaganda that the end is far off—or that it is not coming at all.

(Matthew 16:24) Then Jesus said to his disciples: “If anyone wants to come after me, let him disown himself and pick up his torture stake and keep following me.

w06 4/1 23 ¶9 **‘Go and Make Disciples,** **Baptizing Them’**

⁹What does following Jesus’ example in doing God’s will involve? Jesus said to his disciples: “If anyone wants to come after me, let him disown himself and pick up his torture stake and continually follow me.” (Matthew 16:24) Here he outlined three things that we must do. First, we “disown” ourselves. In other words, we say no to our selfish, imperfect inclinations and yes to God’s counsel and direction. Second, we ‘pick up our torture stake.’ In Jesus’ day a torture stake was a symbol of shame and suffering. As Christians, we accept our part in suffering for the sake of the good news. (2 Timothy 1:8) Although the world may ridicule or reproach us, like Christ we ‘despise shame,’ happy in the knowledge that we are pleasing God.

(Hebrews 12:2) Finally, we follow Jesus “continually.”—Psalm 73:26; 119:44; 145:2.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

(Matthew 16:18) Also, I say to you: You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my congregation, and the gates of the Grave will not overpower it.

nwtsty study note on Mt 16:18

You are Peter, and on this rock: The Greek word *pe'tros* in the masculine gender means “a piece of rock; a stone.” Here it is used as a proper name (Peter), the Greek form of the name Jesus gave Simon. (Joh 1:42) The feminine form *pe'tra* is rendered “rock,” and it may denote bedrock, a cliff, or a mass of rock. This Greek word also occurs at Mt 7:24, 25; 27:60; Lu 6:48; 8:6; Ro 9:33; 1Co 10:4; 1Pe 2:8. Peter evidently did not view himself as the rock on which Jesus would build his congregation, since he wrote at 1Pe 2:4-8 that Jesus was the long-foretold “foundation cornerstone,” chosen by God himself. Similarly, the apostle Paul referred to Jesus as the “foundation” and “the spiritual rock.” (1Co 3:11; 10:4) So Jesus was evidently using a play on words, saying in effect: ‘You, the one I called Peter, a Piece of Rock, have discerned the true identity of the Christ, “this rock,” the one who will serve as the foundation of the Christian congregation.’

congregation: This is the first occurrence of the Greek term *ek-kle-si'a*. It comes from two Greek words, *ek*, meaning “out,” and *ka-le'o*, meaning “to call.” It refers to a group of people summoned or called together for a particular purpose or activity. (See Glossary.) In this context, Jesus foretells the formation of the Christian congregation, made up of anointed Christians, who as “living stones” are being “built up into a spiritual house.” (1Pe 2:4, 5) This Greek term is frequently used in the *Septuagint* as an equivalent of the Hebrew term

rendered “congregation,” which often refers to the entire nation of God’s people. (De 23:3; 31:30) At Ac 7:38, the Israelites who were called out of Egypt are referred to as a “congregation.” Similarly, Christians who are “called . . . out of darkness” and “chosen . . . out of the world” make up “the congregation of God.”—1Pe 2:9; Joh 15:19; 1Co 1:2.

(Matthew 16:19) I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of the heavens, and whatever you may bind on earth will already be bound in the heavens, and whatever you may loosen on earth will already be loosened in the heavens.”

nwtsty study note on Mt 16:19

keys of the Kingdom of the heavens: In the Bible, those who were given certain keys, whether literal or figurative, were entrusted with a degree of authority. (1Ch 9:26, 27; Isa 22:20-22) So the term “key” came to symbolize authority and responsibility. Peter used these “keys” entrusted to him to open up for Jews (Ac 2:22-41), Samaritans (Ac 8:14-17), and Gentiles (Ac 10:34-38) the opportunity to receive God’s spirit with a view to their entering the heavenly Kingdom.

Bible Reading

(Matthew 16:1-20) Here the Pharisees and Sadducees approached him, and to test him, they asked him to display to them a sign from heaven. ² In reply he said to them: “When evening falls, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is fire-red,’ ³ and in the morning, ‘It will be wintry, rainy weather today, for the sky is fire-red but gloomy.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but the signs of the times you cannot interpret. ⁴ A wicked and adulterous generation keeps seeking a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jo’nah.” With that he went away, leav-

ing them behind. ⁵ Now the disciples crossed to the other side and forgot to take bread along. ⁶ Jesus said to them: “Keep your eyes open and watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ⁷ So they began to reason among themselves, saying: “We did not take any loaves along.” ⁸ Knowing this, Jesus said: “Why are you discussing among yourselves that you have no loaves, you with little faith? ⁹ Do you not yet see the point, or do you not remember the five loaves in the case of the 5,000 and how many baskets you took up? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves in the case of the 4,000 and how many large baskets you took up? ¹¹ How is it you do not discern that I did not speak to you about bread? But watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ¹² Then they grasped that he said to watch out, not for the leaven of bread, but for the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. ¹³ When he had come into the region of Caes-a-re’a Phi-lip’pi, Jesus asked his disciples: “Who are men saying the Son of man is?” ¹⁴ They said: “Some say John the Baptist, others E-li’jah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them: “You, though, who do you say I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ In response Jesus said to him: “Happy you are, Simon son of Jo’nah, because flesh and blood did not reveal it to you, but my Father in the heavens did. ¹⁸ Also, I say to you: You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my congregation, and the gates of the Grave will not overpower it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of the heavens, and whatever you may bind on earth will already be bound in the heavens, and whatever you may loosen on earth will already be loosened in the heavens.” ²⁰ Then he sternly instructed the disciples not to tell anybody that he was the Christ.

FEBRUARY 26–MARCH 4

TREASURES FROM GOD'S WORD | MATTHEW 18-19

“Carefully Avoid Stumbling Yourself and Others”

(Matthew 18:6, 7) But whoever stumbles one of these little ones who have faith in me, it would be better for him to have hung around his neck a millstone that is turned by a donkey and to be sunk in the open sea. ⁷ “Woe to the world because of the stumbling blocks! Of course, it is inevitable that stumbling blocks will come, but woe to the man through whom the stumbling block comes!

nwtsty study notes on Mt 18:6, 7

a millstone that is turned by a donkey: Or “a huge millstone.” Lit., “a millstone of a donkey.” Such a millstone, likely 1.2-1.5 m (4-5 ft) in diameter, was so heavy that it had to be turned by a donkey.

stumbling blocks: The original meaning of the Greek word *skan'da-lon*, rendered “stumbling block,” is thought to have referred to a trap; some suggest that it was the stick in a trap to which the bait was attached. By extension, it came to refer to any impediment that would cause one to stumble or fall. In a figurative sense, it refers to an action or circumstance that leads a person to follow an improper course, to stumble or fall morally, or to fall into sin. At Mt 18:8, 9, the related verb *skan-da-li'-zo*, translated “make stumble,” could also be rendered “become a snare; cause to sin.”

nwtsty media

Millstone

Millstones were used for grinding grain and pressing oil out of olives. Some were small enough to be turned by hand, but others were so huge that they had to be turned by an animal. It may have been a large millstone similar to this one that Samson was forced to turn for

the Philistines. (Jg 16:21) The animal-powered mill was common not only in Israel but also throughout much of the Roman Empire.

Upper and Lower Millstones

A large millstone like the one depicted here would be turned by a domestic animal, such as a donkey, and be used to grind grain or crush olives. An upper millstone might be as much as 1.5 m (5 ft) in diameter and would be turned on an even larger lower stone.

(Matthew 18:8, 9) If, then, your hand or your foot makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it away from you. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or lame than to be thrown with two hands or two feet into the everlasting fire. ⁹ Also, if your eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it away from you. It is better for you to enter one-eyed into life than to be thrown with two eyes into the fiery Geh-en'na.

nwtsty study note on Mt 18:9

Gehenna: This term comes from the Hebrew words *geh hin-nom'*, meaning “valley of Hinnom,” which lay to the W and S of ancient Jerusalem. (See App. B12, map “Jerusalem and Surrounding Area.”) By Jesus' day, the valley had become a place for burning refuse, so the word “Gehenna” was a fitting symbol of complete destruction.

nwtstg Glossary

Gehenna

The Greek name for the Valley of Hinnom, southwest of ancient Jerusalem. (Jer 7:31) It was prophetically spoken of as a place where dead bodies would be strewn. (Jer 7:32; 19:6) There is no evidence that animals or humans were thrown into Gehenna to be burned alive or tormented. So the place could not symbolize an invisible region where human souls are tormented eternally in literal fire. Rather, Gehenna was used by Jesus and his disciples to symbolize the

eternal punishment of “second death,” that is, everlasting destruction, annihilation.—Re 20:14; Mt 5:22; 10:28.

(Matthew 18:10) See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my Father who is in heaven.

nwtsty study note on Mt 18:10

look upon the face of my Father: Or “have access to my Father.” Because they have access to the very presence of God, only spirit creatures can see God’s face.—Ex 33:20.

w10 11/1 16

How Spirit Creatures Affect Us

Jesus revealed that angels are given the responsibility to look out for the spiritual welfare of God’s servants. Thus, when Jesus warned his disciples against stumbling others, he said: “See to it that you men do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that their angels in heaven always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 18:10) By this, Jesus did not necessarily mean that each of his followers has a guardian angel assigned to him. But Jesus did show that angels who work closely with God have an active interest in members of the Christian congregation.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

(Matthew 18:21, 22) Then Peter came and said to him: “Lord, how many times is my brother to sin against me and am I to forgive him? Up to seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him: “I say to you, not up to seven times, but up to 77 times.

nwtsty study note on Mt 18:22

77 times: Lit., “seventy times seven.” This Greek expression can be understood to mean either “70 and 7” (77 times) or “70 multiplied by 7” (490 times). The same wording found in the *Septuagint* at Ge 4:24 renders the He-

brew expression “77 times,” which supports the rendering “77 times.” Regardless of how it is understood, the repetition of the number seven was equivalent to “indefinitely” or “without limit.” By turning Peter’s 7 times into 77, Jesus was telling his followers not to set an arbitrary limit on forgiveness. In contrast, the Babylonian Talmud (*Yoma 86b*) says: “If a man commits a transgression the first, second and third time he is forgiven, the fourth time he is not forgiven.”

(Matthew 19:7) They said to him: “Why, then, did Moses direct giving a certificate of dismissal and divorcing her?”

nwtsty study note on Mt 19:7

certificate of dismissal: Or “certificate of divorce.” By requiring a man who was considering divorce to prepare a legal document and likely to consult the elders, the Law gave him time to reconsider such a serious decision. The intent of the Law was evidently to prevent rash divorces and to provide women with a measure of legal protection. (De 24:1) But in Jesus’ day, religious leaders had made divorce easy to obtain. The first-century historian Josephus, himself a divorced Pharisee, suggested that divorce was allowable “for any cause whatsoever (and many such causes happen among men).”

nwtsty media

Certificate of Divorce

This certificate of divorce, dated 71 or 72 C.E., was written in Aramaic. It was found on the north side of Wadi Murabbaat, a dry riverbed in the Judean Desert. It states that in the sixth year of the Jewish revolt, Joseph, son of Naqsan, divorced Miriam, daughter of Jonathan who was living in the city of Masada.

Bible Reading

(Matthew 18:18-35) “Truly I say to you, whatever things you may bind on earth will be things already bound in heaven, and whatever things you may loosen on earth will be

things already loosened in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I tell you truly, if two of you on earth agree concerning anything of importance that they should request, it will take place for them on account of my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst.” ²¹ Then Peter came and said to him: “Lord, how many times is my brother to sin against me and am I to forgive him? Up to seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him: “I say to you, not up to seven times, but up to 77 times. ²³ “That is why the Kingdom of the heavens may be likened to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he started to settle them, a man was brought in who owed him 10,000 talents. ²⁵ But because he did not have the means to pay it back, his master ordered him and his wife and his children and all the things he owned to be sold and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell down and did obeisance to him, saying, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay back everything to you.’ ²⁷ Moved with pity at this, the master of that slave let him off and canceled his debt. ²⁸ But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves, who owed him 100 de-nar’-i-i, and grabbed him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back whatever you owe.’ ²⁹ So his fellow slave fell down and began to beg him, saying, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ ³⁰ However, he was not willing, but he went and had him thrown into prison until he could pay back what he owed. ³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they became greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all the things that had happened. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him: ‘Wicked slave, I canceled all that debt for you when you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not also have shown mercy to your fellow slave as I

showed mercy to you?’ ³⁴ With that his master, provoked to wrath, handed him over to the jailers until he repaid all that he owed. ³⁵ My heavenly Father will also deal with you in the same way if each of you does not forgive your brother from your heart.”