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1) 1 Samuel 13:1 and the preservation of the Hebrew Text

When I was a new student in my ThM program, one of the prime movers in the Majority Text vineyard was in his last year, and we worked together in the Seminary kitchen. Our tongues wagged about as fast as our hands moved; we did a lot of talking, mostly about things text-critical and theological. In those pristine years, he was a firm believer in the divine preservation of both the Hebrew and Greek Testaments, to the letter. In due time I came to Brazil as a missionary, and he continued in his teaching career. Every furlough (back then field terms were usually five years) I would touch base with him and compare notes. On one of those occasions (I forget which one), when the subject of divine preservation came up, he opened a Bible to 1 Samuel 13:1 and affirmed that the original wording of that verse had been irretrievably lost—bye-bye preservation.

Well now, what he did to me, someone else had done to him, and so on into the night. I rather imagine that this verse has come to represent a difficulty in the thinking of not a few people who would like to believe in the divine preservation of the Text, but . . . Since I still believed in preservation at that time (and continue to do so), his gesture gave me pause—could he possibly be correct? So I sat down and studied the situation (including an inquiry to the local synagogue). Here is my conclusion.

The NKJV renders 1 Samuel 13:1-2 like this: “Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose for himself three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in the mountains of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent away, every man to his tent.” In the NIV the first verse is quite different: “Saul was [⌊]thirty[⌋] years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel [⌊]forty[⌋] two years.” A footnote informs the reader that the bracketed words are not in the Hebrew Text. An uninitiated layperson who compares the two could easily conclude that they are translating completely different texts, but such is not the case. The Hebrew text is one, without variants—the problem lies in the interpretation.

An interlinear, morpheme by morpheme, rendering of the first verse looks like this: “Son-of-a-year Saul in-his-reigning and-two years he-reigned over-Israel” (except, of course, that Hebrew is read from right to left). The confusion arises in that this became a formula used in the summary statement about a king’s reign: a son of X years was Y in his reigning (= when he began to reign), and he reigned Z years . . . The formula usually occurs at the end of a king’s history, but sometimes at the beginning. Of course, any attempt to apply the formula in 1 Samuel 13:1 is ridiculous. Obviously Saul could not have been one year old when he began to reign, and just as obviously he reigned more than two years. Unfortunately, NIV and others have insisted on imposing the formula on this verse, inventing the ‘thirty’ and ‘forty-’ so as not to have complete nonsense. (This also has the unfortunate effect of contradicting Acts 13:21, that affirms that Saul reigned 40 years, not 42.) I suppose they have convinced themselves that the original numbers have disappeared from the Text, having been irretrievably lost during the process of transmission.

But let us look carefully at the context of 13:1. To begin, Saul being the very first king of Israel, such a formula would not yet be in use—there had been no occasion to write of the beginning and length of reigns. Then, in the context this is not the place for a summary statement; it is neither the beginning nor the end of the history of Saul’s reign. In 1 Samuel 10:24 he was publicly installed as king—

since he was the first, there was no precedent, no established procedure. In Chapter 11 Saul defeats the Ammonites and is confirmed in the kingship (verse 15). In chapter 12 Samuel defends his ministry and gives a lesson in history. Chapter 13 resumes Saul's story and starts by saying when he established a standing army—in the second year of his reign.

I invite special attention to the concluding statement of verse two, "The rest of the people he sent away, every man to his tent." To be 'sent away' they had to be there. Be where? In Gilgal (11:15), where Samuel's discourse (chapter 12) also took place, as part of the occasion. According to 11:9, Saul had mobilized 330,000 men against the Ammonites, and I imagine that most of them had accompanied Samuel and Saul to Gilgal. So 13:1-2 is a continuation of what happened at Gilgal, and verse one **CANNOT** be a summary statement about Saul's total reign. Of the 330,000 that had been mobilized against Ammon, Saul chose 3,000 to be a standing army and sent the rest home. Perhaps the lack of a standing army had encouraged the Ammonites to get frisky; the news that Israel now had one would serve as a deterrent.

I take the point of 13:1 to be that Saul had a full year behind him, so these events at Gilgal took place during his second year. Hebrew is not my forte, but I would paraphrase our verse something like this, "Saul had reigned for a full year over Israel, and it was during his second year that he chose for himself three thousand men . . ."

I reject as unfounded the allegation that some of the original wording of 1 Samuel 13:1 has been lost. The NIV does a considerable disservice to the Kingdom of God here.

2) Abiathar is not Ahimelech

Mark 2:26 X 1 Samuel 21:1

Some of my readers may be aware that this verse has destroyed the faith of at least one scholar in our day, although he was reared in an evangelical home. He understood Jesus to be saying that Abiathar was the priest with whom David dealt, when in fact it was his father, Ahimelech. If Jesus stated an historical error as fact, then he could not be God. So he turned his back on Jesus. I consider that his decision was lamentable and unnecessary, and in the interest of helping others who may be troubled by this verse, I offer the following explanation:

"How he entered the house of God (making Abiathar high priest) and ate the consecrated bread, which only priests are permitted to eat, and shared it with those who were with him."

My rendering is rather different than the 'in the days of Abiathar the high priest' of the AV, NKJV and NIV. We are translating three Greek words that very literally would be 'upon Abiathar high-priest' (but the preposition here, *επι*, is the most versatile of the Greek prepositions, and one of its many meanings/uses is 'toward'—the standard lexicon, BDAG, lists fully eighteen areas of meaning, quite apart from sub-divisions). When we go back to the Old Testament account, we discover that David actually conversed with Ahimelech, Abiathar's father, who was the high priest at that moment (1 Samuel 21:1-9). Within a few days Saul massacred Ahimelech and 84 other priests (1 Samuel 22:16-18), but his son Abiathar escaped and went to David, taking the ephod with him (1 Samuel 22:20-23; 23:6). That David could use it to inquire of the LORD rather suggests that it had to be the

ephod that only the high priest wore, since only that ephod had the Urim and Thummim (1 Samuel 23:9-12; cf. Numbers 27:21, Ezra 2:63).

That ephod was to a high priest like the crown was to a king; so how could Abiathar have it? The Text states that David's visit filled Ahimelech with fear, presumably because he too saw Doeg the Edomite and figured what would happen. Now why wasn't Abiathar taken with the others? I suggest that Ahimelech foresaw what would happen (Doeg probably took off immediately, and Ahimelech figured he wouldn't have much time), so he deliberately consecrated Abiathar, gave him the ephod, and told him to hide—he probably did it that very day (once the soldiers arrived to arrest Ahimelech and the other 84, it would be too late). Abiathar escaped, but carried the news of the massacre with him; only now he was the high priest.

Putting it all together, it was David's visit that resulted in Abiathar's becoming high priest prematurely, as David himself recognized, and to which Jesus alluded in passing (which is why I used parentheses). But why would Jesus allude to that? I suppose because the Bible is straightforward about the consequences of sin, and David lied to Ahimelech. Although Jesus was using David's eating that bread as an example, He did not wish to gloss over the sin, and its consequences.

Recall that Jesus was addressing Pharisees, who were steeped in the OT Scriptures. A notorious case like Saul's massacre of 85 priests would be very well known. And of course, none of the NT had yet been written, so any understanding of what Jesus said had to be based on 1 Samuel ("Have you never read...?"). If we today wish to understand this passage, we need to place ourselves in the context recorded in Mark 2:23-28. The Pharisees would understand that if Abiathar was in possession of the ephod with the Urim and Thummim, then he was the high priest. And how did he get that way? He got that way because of David's visit. It was an immediate consequence of that visit.

Some may object that 'making' is a verb, not a preposition. Well, the 'in the days of' of the AV, etc., though not a verb, is a phrase. Both a pronoun and an adverb may stand for a phrase, and a preposition may as well. TEV and Phillips actually use a verb: 'when... was'; NLT has 'during the days when... was'. Where the others used from two to five words, I used only one.

3) A 'crumb' for a 'puppy'

The relevant texts are: Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-31^a.

Matthew 15:—21 Going out from there Jesus withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And then, a Canaanite woman coming from those parts cried out to Him saying: "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demonized." 23 But He answered her not a word. So His disciples came and urged Him saying, "Send her away, because she is crying out after us". 24 But in answer He said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel".^a 25 So she came and worshipped Him saying, "Lord, help me!" 26 But in answer He said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs". 27 So she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table". 28 Then Jesus answered and said to her: "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that *very* hour.

^a Although His ultimate mission included the whole world (see the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20), His earthly ministry was directed to the "house of Israel".

Mark 7:—24 Then He got ready and went from there into the region of Tyre and Sidon. He went into a house and did not want anyone to know it, but He could not escape notice. 25 In fact, as soon as she heard about Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit came and fell at His feet. 26 Now the woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenecian by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 But Jesus said to her, “Let the children be filled first; it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs”. 28 So she answered and said to Him, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children’s crumbs”. 29 So He said to her, “Because of this saying you may go; the demon has gone out of your daughter”. 30 She went away to her house and found that the demon was gone and the daughter had been placed on the bed. 31 Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus came to the Sea of Galilee by way of the Decapolis region.

Here we have a moving account of faith, determination and humility; perhaps it will have some practical lessons for us. My discussion will attempt to follow the actual sequence of events.

1) To begin, we observe that Jesus left the Jewish Galilee and went to the Gentile Tyre and Sidon. Now why do you suppose He did that, since He would presently say, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24)? In that case, what was He doing in Tyre? Well, maybe He just wanted to get away and rest a bit; upon arriving “He went into a house and did not want anyone to know it, but He could not escape notice” (Mark 7:24). A group of thirteen foreigners would tend to attract some attention, even if they tried to keep a low profile. Still, the Text plainly says that Jesus tried to avoid being noticed. How then did the ‘puppy’ know that Jesus was coming before He even arrived?!

2) From Mark’s account one could assume that the woman appeared after Jesus was in the house, but Matthew’s account tells us something else. Notice verse 23: His disciples came and urged Him saying, “Send her away, because she is crying out after us” (Mark does say that she kept asking, verse 26). They were still on the road, and the woman was following them. Further, she addressed Him as the Jewish Messiah: a Canaanite woman coming from those parts cried out to Him saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demonized” (Matthew 15:22). “Son of David”—as a Canaanite she appealed to the Jewish Messiah, upon whom she had no claim. But how did she know that? I suspect there is more to this story than meets the eye. The only explanation that I can see is that the woman received divine orientation; she was told where to go and what to say. In that event, helping that woman may have been the purpose for the trip.

3) The woman began with, “Lord, Son of David”, to which Jesus returned no answer, since she had no claim upon Him in those terms. However, since she would not stop, and did not keep her voice down, she was ‘blowing their cover’. So the disciples appealed to Jesus for relief, to which He replied, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). The Lord spoke loudly enough for her to hear, since His answer was as much, if not more so, for her as it was for the disciples. So she came and worshipped Him saying, “Lord, help me!” (Matthew 15:25). She got the message, because she now dropped the appeal to the Messiah. Mark 7:25 tells us that she “fell at His feet”, so either Jesus had stopped or she had run ahead so she could stop Him.

4) Now we come to an unusual conversation. Our Lord’s choice of terms would probably strike most readers as being unexpectedly harsh. “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs” (Matthew 15:26, Mark 7:27).

Dear me, Jesus called her a dog (and a ‘little’ one at that)! To be sure, at that time Jews commonly referred to Gentiles as ‘dogs’, but why would Jesus follow suit? I imagine that He was testing her humility, since she had already, as I believe, received a special dispensation of grace. (One is reminded of Cornelius.) And she passed the test! So she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (Matthew 15:27). Big dogs would not be in the house, so these would be little house pets, or perhaps puppies. Then Jesus answered and said to her: “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire. Because of this saying you may go; the demon has gone out of your daughter” (Matthew 15:28, Mark 7:29).

5) “She went away to her house and found that the demon was gone and the daughter had been placed on the bed” (Mark 7:30). The verb ‘place’ is perfect passive; evidently the child was too small, or too weak, to have gotten there by herself.

6) “Departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus came to the Sea of Galilee” (Mark 7:31). We are not told whether Jesus did anything else while in that region. If not, He apparently went there just to help that woman. But why would He do something like that?—it involved time and inconvenience. Well, consider 2 Chronicles 16:9. “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (NKJV). God’s ‘search’ covers the whole earth, so is not limited to nation or place, and not to time either. Cornelius is a biblical example, but there have doubtless been many others down through history (I have seen it myself). So if you are needing some ‘strong’ help, here is the key—the language of the Text indicates that God is just waiting to give that help. How about another doxology!

This episode always moves me. In effect, Jesus called the woman a ‘dog’ (that is what Jews called Gentiles), and she accepted the classification. She was determined to get her ‘crumb’, and she did! And she left us a great example of humility, determination and faith!

4) A desperate woman

The relevant texts are: Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:24-34 and Luke 8:42^b-48.

Matthew 9:—20 And then, a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. 21 For she kept saying to herself, “If only I may touch His garment I will be healed”. 22 But Jesus, turning around and seeing her, said, “Take courage, daughter; your faith has made you well”. And the woman was healed from that *very* hour.

Mark 5:—24 A large crowd was also following Him, and they were pressing around Him. 25 Now a certain woman—who had been bleeding for twelve years, 26 and had suffered many things under many doctors, and had spent all that she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse—27 when she heard about Jesus, she came from behind in the crowd and touched His garment. 28 (She had kept saying, “If I can just touch His clothes, I will be healed”.) 29 Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up, and she knew in her body that she was healed from the affliction. 30 And instantly Jesus perceived within Himself that some power had gone out of Him, and turning around in the crowd He said, “Who touched my clothes?” 31 So His disciples said to Him, “You see the crowd pressing around you, yet you say, ‘Who

touched me??" 32 But He kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 So the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. 34 And He said to her: "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go into peace and be healed from your affliction."

Luke 8:—Now as He was going, the crowds were pressing against Him. 43 And a woman—suffering with a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent her whole livelihood on physicians, but could not be healed by any—44 approaching from behind touched the border of His garment; and immediately the flow of her blood stopped! 45 So Jesus said, "Who touched me?" When all denied it, Peter and those with him said: "Master, the people are pressing against you and crowding in, and you say, 'Who touched me?'"^a 46 But Jesus said, "Someone did touch me, because I noticed power going out from me". 47 Now when the woman saw that she could not hide, she came trembling, and falling down before Him she told Him in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately. 48 So He said: "Courage, daughter, your faith has healed you. Go into peace."

Here we have a moving account of faith, determination and perseverance; perhaps it will have some practical lessons for us. My discussion will attempt to follow the actual sequence of events. Matthew's account is abbreviated, so I will depend mainly on the other two.

1) The street was presumably not very wide, and both Mark and Luke inform us that it was filled with a crowd that was pressing around and against Jesus. Indeed, Mark 5:31 and Luke 8:45 reinforce the observation. Obviously this represented a problem for the woman; how could she get to Jesus through that crowd, the more especially if it was made up mostly, if not entirely, of men? For any woman to push through a crowd of men would be unacceptable, but she had an added problem.

2) From Matthew 9:1 and the context we may conclude that this episode transpired in Capernaum, which really was not all that big a town. The point is, that woman would be a known person. The available space was packed with people, the crowd was on both sides of Jesus, as well as behind, so she would have to force her way through. However, this represented a difficulty beyond just being rude. According to Leviticus 15:19-27, any discharge of blood made a woman 'unclean', and verse 25 deals with prolonged hemorrhage—anyone who touched her, or even her clothes, became 'unclean' as well. So everyone she touched on her way through the crowd became 'unclean'! Now she and her problem were well known, so the people she touched were NOT happy. She no doubt got plenty of dirty looks, and maybe a few elbows, as well as some choice expressions. It would have been easy to give up, but she kept repeating her expectation to herself (Matthew 9:21) to keep up her courage, and she was desperate.

3) So why was she desperate? She "had been bleeding for twelve years, and had suffered many things under many doctors, and had spent all that she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse" (Mark 5:25-26). In other words, she was at the end of her financial resources and of any medical hope. Mark almost seems to be accusing the doctors of malpractice. Luke, himself a doctor, is more cautious:

^a Perhaps 1.5% of the Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality, omit "and you say, 'Who touched me?'" (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.).

“a woman suffering with a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent her whole livelihood on physicians, but could not be healed by any” (Luke 8:43). No wonder the woman was desperate, but then “she heard about Jesus” (Mark 5:27), and all of a sudden she had hope!

4) Well, she managed it. She wormed through the crowd and “touched the hem of His garment” (Matthew 9:20). “Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up, and she knew in her body that she was healed from the affliction” (Mark 5:29). Note that all she had to do was touch; this sort of thing, people getting healed just by touching His clothes, happened repeatedly during the Lord’s earthly ministry. Jesus could have let the incident pass, but He chose not to. He stopped and turned around.

5) “Instantly Jesus perceived within Himself that some power had gone out of Him, and turning around in the crowd He said: Who touched my clothes?” (Mark 5:30). When Luke writes that “all denied it” (8:45), we may understand that it was by their silence; no one spoke up. But Jesus insisted, “He kept looking around to see who had done it” (Mark 5:32). When the disciples protested that He was being ‘touched’ all the time by the jostling crowd, Jesus said, “Someone did touch me, because I noticed power going out from me” (Luke 8:46). He was referring to a purposeful touch. The woman had evidently withdrawn into the crowd, and may even have been hidden behind others. But Jesus did not let her get away with it.

6) “Now when the woman saw that she could not hide, she came trembling, and falling down before Him she told Him in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately” (Luke 8:47). That was not easy, in front of the crowd, but Jesus gave her no choice. Was He just being mean? No, He was doing her a big favor. The people knew who she was, and about her physical problem; Jesus was declaring her healing, and therefore her cleansing, to the assembled multitude, and by implication those who had been ‘contaminated’ by the woman could relax on that score.

7) Then Jesus said to her: “Courage, daughter, your faith has saved you. Go into peace and be healed from your affliction” (Mark 5:34, Luke 8:48). That is what the Text says, ‘into peace’ not ‘in’. To go ‘in peace’ is to leave on good terms, no hard feelings. But what might going into peace be? I would say that you take the peace with you; you live within an atmosphere of peace. Now that is a proper ‘blessing’! Sovereign Jesus never said ‘go in peace’; He always said “go into peace”—He was giving the person a new life. How about a doxology!

5) Are we to handle snakes?

Mark 16:18

In the NKJV, Mark 16:18 reads like this: “they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”^a

The NIV renders ‘they will pick up snakes with their hands’, the ‘with their hands’ being based on just over 2% of the Greek manuscripts. As we know, there are those who take this translation literally, and believe that they must handle

^a Since only three Greek MSS (really only two) omit Mark 16:9-20, against at least 1,700 that contain them, there can be no reasonable question as to the genuineness of those verses. For more on this subject please see the respective appendix in any recent edition of my book, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*.

poisonous snakes in obedience to God. I respect their sincerity, but believe they have been misled by a faulty translation.

I would say that this particular statement of the Lord's has been generally misunderstood. The verb in question covers a wide semantic area, one of the uses being to pick up the way a garbage man picks up a bag of trash—he does so to get rid of it (hence 'remove'). I believe Luke 10:19 sheds light on this question. In Luke 10:19 the Lord Jesus said: "Behold, I give [so 98% of the Greek manuscripts] you **the** authority to trample on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." The Lord is addressing the Seventy, not the Twelve, and others were doubtless present; further, this was said perhaps four months before His death and resurrection. It follows that this authority is not limited to the apostles, and there is no indication of a time limit. The Lord Jesus affirms that He gives us **the** authority over all the power of the enemy. In Matthew 28:18 He declares that He holds "all authority... in heaven and earth", and so He has the right and the competence to delegate a portion of that authority to us. We may have any number of enemies, but the enemy is Satan. The phrase, "all the power", presumably includes his works, followed by their consequences.

Returning to Luke 10:19, the Lord gives us the authority to "trample snakes and scorpions". Well now, to smash the literal insect, a scorpion, you do not need power from on High, just a slipper (if you are fast you can do it barefoot). To trample a snake I prefer a boot, but we can kill literal snakes without supernatural help. It becomes obvious that Jesus was referring to something other than reptiles and insects. I understand Mark 16:18 to be referring to the same reality—Jesus declares that certain signs will accompany the believers (the turn of phrase virtually has the effect of commands): they will expel demons, they will speak strange languages, they will remove 'snakes', they will place hands on the sick. ("If they drink..." is not a command; it refers to an eventuality.) But what did the Lord Jesus mean by 'snakes'?

In a list of distinct activities Jesus has already referred to demons, so the 'snakes' must be something else. In Matthew 12:34 Jesus called the Pharisees a 'brood of vipers', and in 23:33, 'snakes, brood of vipers'. In John 8:44, after they claimed God as their father, Jesus said, "You are of your father the devil". And 1 John 3:10 makes clear that Satan has many other 'sons'. In Revelation 20:2 we read: "He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is a slanderer, even Satan, who deceives the whole inhabited earth, and bound him for a thousand years." If Satan is a snake, then his children are also snakes. So then, I take it that our 'snakes' are human beings who chose to serve Satan, who sold themselves to evil. I conclude that the 'snakes' in Luke 10:19 are the same as those in Mark 16:18, but what of the 'scorpions'? Since they also are of the enemy, they may be demons, in which case the term may well include their offspring, the humanoids [see my paper, "In the Days of Noah", available from my site: www.prunch.org]. I am still working on the question of just how the removal is to be done.

6) Baptisms in the Bible

Our vocabulary item 'baptism', and its verb 'baptize', are transliterations of the corresponding terms in the Greek New Testament. I am not aware of equivalents in Hebrew, so I will base this study on the NT, including for the baptisms in the OT. Why did the translators into English choose to transliterate rather than translate? Probably because, as with Hebrew, we have no corresponding terms that would serve for a translation. Of course, by now the

transliterated terms are part of our vocabulary. I will organize this study of the baptisms under three headings: 1) during the old covenant, 2) during the transition, 3) during the new covenant.

Baptisms during the old covenant

1) In 1 Corinthians 10:2 our versions generally say that the people who departed from Egypt “were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea”. I would prefer ‘by the cloud and by the sea’, but what is the point of the statement? The people were identified with Moses, and that identification translated into dependence and obedience. Without Moses they would not have crossed the sea, and they had to obey ‘blindly’, as it were, no matter how improbable the situation. They were guided and protected by the cloud, but under the authority of Moses. An identification that expresses itself in dependence and obedience might well serve for a definition of Christian baptism, at least in part.

2) Mark wrote for a Roman audience, and in 7:3-4 he explains certain Jewish customs:

Because the Pharisees, indeed all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they baptize themselves. And there are many other things they have received and hold—baptisms of cups, pitchers, copper vessels and couches.

‘The tradition of the elders’ was based on the written instructions given by Moses that had to do with purification. That purification was done with water. The idea of purification is not foreign to Christian baptism.

3) Based on extra-biblical information (not in the Bible), we know that a Gentile who converted to Judaism was baptized—it was one of the requirements that he had to fulfill. That baptism was done with water, but there is doubt as to just how it was done. However, it appears that it represented a formal declaration to the effect that the person was changing religion, or way of life. It was a procedure that carried with it significant consequences in both the social and spiritual spheres. We may understand that such a baptism served as a background for John’s baptism—the people were used to the idea.

Baptisms during the transition

1) All four of the Gospels speak of the ministry of John the Baptizer. John began his ministry proclaiming and offering a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins^a (Mark 1:4). Matthew and Mark record that the candidates would confess their sins; of course, it was their sins that they were repenting of. All four of the Gospels record that John was preparing the way of the LORD. John himself affirmed that he baptized with water, but the Text does not clarify how he did it.

2) John baptized Jesus. This was a unique case that did not fit the declared nature of the baptism offered by John. Jesus had no sin; He had nothing to repent of; He did not need pardon. Indeed, John did not like the idea: “I have need to be baptized by You, and You are coming to me?” (Matthew 3:14). In answer Jesus said

^a There are those who squirm at the plain meaning of the Text—John was offering forgiveness of sins. Well, throughout the Old Testament, if you brought an animal offering, you were confessing to being a sinner, and expecting to be forgiven. As forerunner to the Lamb of God, who would provide the ultimate payment for sin, John represented a transition, from the old to the new. Should someone ask, “How could one person pay for the sins of the whole world?”, I offer the following possibility: to pay an infinite debt, would require an infinite person, and Jesus was, and is, an infinite person.

to him, “Permit it now, because thus it is appropriate for us to fulfill all righteousness”. This response has given rise to a variety of interpretations, but upon reflection, we do not need to interpret it, since it was not a norm or an example to be followed; it was *sui generis*.

3) John 3:22, 26; 4:1 and 2 mention that the disciples of Jesus were baptizing—John 4:2 makes clear that Jesus Himself was not baptizing. The Text does not offer any details about the nature of that baptism. We may imagine that they were following John’s example, helping to prepare the way of the LORD. The absolute lack of detail makes clear that this baptism did not become a norm to be followed. However, if they were indeed using John’s baptism, it continued to be used, here and there, for some time, as Acts 18:25 and 19:3 make clear.

4) In Luke 12:50 Jesus said, “I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!” When Jesus responded to the ambitious request from James and John, He referred to the same baptism (Matthew 20:22-23, Mark 10:38-39). It appears to refer to suffering within God the Father’s Plan. In His response to James and John He also referred to the ‘cup’, the same one He mentioned in Gethsemane. As for Jesus, this baptism was fulfilled on the cross at Golgotha, which happened before the new covenant. As for James and John, they experienced this baptism later on. If my description of this baptism is correct, then it still exists today (1 Peter 4:19).

Baptisms during the new covenant

1) John the Baptizer said that Jesus would baptize “with Holy spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16). There has been no lack of interpretations for this statement, but I would say that the next verse clarifies the intended meaning: “whose winnowing shovel is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor and gather the wheat into His barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” See also Matthew 3:11-12. Now then, the ‘unquenchable fire’ must refer to the Lake of fire and brimstone, the second death, and in that case the ‘chaff’ refers to the lost—it is the lost who will be baptized with fire.^a In that case, the ‘wheat’ refers to the saved—those who are genuinely saved will have been baptized with Holy Spirit. But just how and when does Jesus baptize us with Holy Spirit? He does it from His position at the Father’s right hand (1 Peter 3:21-22), when we believe into Him. At that point the Holy Spirit begins to indwell us, and He has a good deal to do with our ‘new nature’. I take it that Acts 1:5 refers to this baptism, as does Acts 11:16; it began on the day of Pentecost.

The case of Cornelius deserves its own paragraph. Cornelius really wanted to know God and to please Him—he was serious! So when Peter began to expound, Cornelius hung on his every word. When Peter got to “everyone who believes into Him^b will receive forgiveness of sins”, Cornelius did! And Jesus baptized him with Holy Spirit. Poor Peter, Jesus got ahead of him, and as he later said in his defense, “who was I to be able to withstand God?” (Acts 11:17). So then Peter said to bring on the water (Acts 10:47)—please notice the order: first Holy Spirit, then water!

I understand Mark 16:16 to refer to this baptism. “The one who believed and was baptized will be saved; but the one who did not believe will be condemned.” In

^a According to 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, the works of the saved will be tried by fire. Although John certainly said “and fire”, both Matthew (according to 80% of the Greek manuscripts) and Mark omit the phrase. Why? I suppose because they were focusing on the present and near future, while the ‘fire’ is part of the final Judgment.

^b The Text always says ‘believe into’, not ‘in’—a change of location is involved, from being outside to being inside, which requires commitment.

the Text, the verbs ‘believe’ and ‘baptize’ are participles in the past tense—one could render ‘the one having believed and having been baptized’.^a There will be no lack of people who were baptized with water in Hell; baptism with water does not save. The Text says that the person who did not believe will be condemned, with no mention of baptism—it should be obvious that Jesus will not baptize someone who did not believe. Let me repeat that: it should be obvious that Jesus will not baptize someone who did not believe! It is the person who genuinely believes who receives the Holy Spirit. One needs to remember that the commission Jesus stated here in Mark was given in the evening of Resurrection day, while the commission that He stated in Matthew, that inaugurated Christian baptism, was given weeks later in Galilee. Here in Mark Christian baptism did not yet exist.

I stated that water baptism does not save; how then do I explain Acts 2:38? “Repent and be baptized, each one of you, upon the name of Jesus Christ, for forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”. To begin, this took place on the day of Pentecost itself, and may have been something of a transition. Then, the context is king of interpretation, and the context here is very specific, so what Peter said should not be taken as a generic standard. Verses 36 and 40 are crucial to understanding Peter. “Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom **you** crucified!”^b (verse 36). So then they asked what they should do. Peter concluded with, “Escape from this perverse generation!” (verse 40). The ‘generation’ in question was the one that had crucified the Messiah. By being baptized upon the name of **Jesus Christ** they would be formally disassociating themselves from that generation, and the judgment that was coming upon it. This is the first use of the title, Jesus Christ, after the Gospels; the Lord had Himself inaugurated the title fifty days before (John 17:3)—it affirms that Jesus is the Messiah. Anyone being baptized upon that name would be publicly declaring allegiance to Jesus **as the Messiah**. Peter promised forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit to any who entered into that commitment. Anyone who did that would be believing into Jesus, and He would baptize them with Holy Spirit. It was not the water that saved them.

I understand that 1 Peter 3:21 also refers to this baptism; the poor verse has suffered considerably at the hands of commentators. Since there was no lack of water around Noah’s Ark, interpreters have tended to carry the water over to the baptism in the next verse, but it does not follow. Consider: verses 19 and 20 mention certain rebellious angels in Noah’s day, “while the Ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is eight, souls were brought safely through water”. Then comes verse 21, that I would translate like this: “Its antitype^c now saves us also, a baptism through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.” So just which baptism might this be? It is Jesus baptizing with Holy Spirit, from His position at the Father’s right hand. Just as the Ark preserved the eight from the water, the baptism with the Holy Spirit preserves us from Satan and his subordinates. The careful reader will have noticed that verse 21 above is not complete; I did not include the parenthetical explanatory aside: “(not the removal

^a Unfortunately, every version that I have seen (including my own!—that I will change for the 3rd edition) puts the verbs in the present tense, which makes it easier to think in terms of water baptism.

^b Nothing like making sure your audience gets the point! But why “both Lord and Christ”? Perhaps there were a variety of ideas about the ‘Messiah’ out there and Peter nails down His identity as the Lord.

^c The antecedent of ‘its’ is the Ark.

of physical filth, but the appeal into God from a good conscience”). I would place it at the end of verse 21, as I translated it, between ‘Christ’ and ‘who’. Peter makes it clear that he is not talking about baptism with water.

In John’s baptism, he is the agent; in Christ’s baptism, He is the agent; a baptism where the Holy Spirit is the agent is different (as also where believers are the agents). In John’s baptism, the substance used was water; in Christ’s baptism, the substance used is the Holy Spirit. In John’s baptism, the person got wet, but then dried off, so the true meaning of the procedure was a spiritual transaction; how much more then with Christ’s baptism. I believe that we may link the baptism where Christ is the agent to John 4:13-14 and 7:38-39.

Jesus answered and said to her: “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that **I** will give him will never ever thirst; rather, the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water, welling up into eternal life.”^a

“The one believing into me, just as the Scripture has said, out from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.”^b 39 (Now He said this about the Spirit, whom those believing into Him were going to receive,^c in that the Holy Spirit had not yet been *given*, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.)

In other words, when Jesus baptizes you, you are regenerated, you receive a new nature, you receive the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:5 refers to “one Lord, one faith, one baptism”. But as we all know, there are a number of baptisms in the Bible, and even in the Church age. The only viable candidate for this ‘one baptism’ is the one where Jesus Christ, the ‘one Lord’, is the agent. Anyone who has not been baptized by Jesus is not part of the Church.

2) The main text for Christian baptism, so to say, is the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20:

And approaching, Jesus asserted to them saying: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 As you go,^d make disciples in all ethnic nations: baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit;^e 20 teaching them to obey everything that I

^a That is what the Text says, “into eternal life”. Eternal life is a quality of life, more precisely a life in communion with the Father. The picture is not necessarily of a geyser, water spouting up, but there has to be a constant flow. As our capacity increases, the flow should also increase. Of course the water must be shared with others, or we become stagnant.

^b Just where does the Scripture say this, and why “rivers” (pl); would not one be enough? Reference Bibles will give a variety of suggestions, none of which really fit. I personally believe that the reference is to Ezekiel 47:1-12, and most especially to verse 9 where the Hebrew Text has two rivers (or torrents)—when that river got to the Dead Sea it evidently divided, so as to go along both banks at once. Living water takes life and health wherever it goes. So how much living water is flowing out of me, or you? The secret of that water is given in verse 12: “their water flows from the sanctuary” (‘their’ refers to the trees). Compare 1 Corinthians 6:19.

^c When you believe into Jesus you receive the Holy Spirit.

^d The familiar ‘therefore’ is found in perhaps 5% of the Greek manuscripts, but it is a logical inference.

^e Our Lord defines the Trinity here. According to Greek grammar the use of ‘and’ plus the definite article with items in a series makes clear that the items are distinct entities. So “the Father” is different from “the Son” is different from “the Holy Spirit”. So we have three persons. But He also said, “into the name”, singular, not ‘names’. So we have only one name. God is one ‘name’ or essence, subsisting in three persons.

commanded you:^a and take note, I am with you every day, until the end of the age!”^b

The order is to make disciples, not just to ‘win souls’. So how does one make a disciple? The two gerunds explain it: “baptizing them” and “teaching them”, which should be done by those who themselves are genuine disciples. What concerns us here is the baptizing. The substance used is water, as in John’s baptism, but the agents are disciples of Jesus. And this baptism is to be administered into the name of the Trinity, which represents a new revelation about the nature of God. It also represents a new ‘religion’, quite different from those previously known. In the OT there are veiled references, that as we look back we can associate with the Trinity, but here we have the first clear statement on the subject (see footnote 2 below). But what is the significance of being baptized into the name of the Trinity?

A person’s name represents that person. To do something ‘in the name of the king’ means that the something was ordered by that king; the speaker is representing the king (or is claiming to do so). So then, what does it mean to be baptized into the Trinity? Well, if you are inside the Trinity, then you are protected by Them, because before anything can get to you it must pass through the Trinity. This is tremendous! However, it also calls for a marked change in behavior—sinning inside the Trinity does not sound like a good idea! So then, the true meaning of this baptism should be the following: it is a public declaration, taking a public stand, whereby the candidate is formally renouncing Satan, and the world controlled by him, and is placing himself under the protection of the Triune God. It is to change sides, or teams, or kingdoms, and this carries with it an appropriate change in lifestyle.^c

I confess that I do not understand why, to judge by the inspired accounts, the apostles were not rigorous in the manner in which they obeyed the Commission. At least, according to Acts 2:38, the baptism was “upon the name of Jesus Christ”, and according to Acts 10:48, Peter commanded to baptize Cornelius and company “in the name of the Lord Jesus”.^d And according to Acts 19:5, Paul baptized those disciples of John “into the name of the Lord Jesus”. But upon reflection, I suppose that the practical result would be the same—to be under the protection of Sovereign Jesus would amount to being under the protection of the Trinity.

In fact, Jesus was the ultimate revelation of the nature of God to man. As He Himself said to Phillip, “he who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). “In Him all the Fullness was pleased to dwell” (Colossians 1:19), and “all the Fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9). In short, as He walked this earth, Jesus represented the Trinity.

As with John’s baptism, the Text does not specify how this baptism was administered. In consequence, down through the centuries, there has been argument and disagreement about it, as to how much water should be used. I see no way of settling the question, and it probably does not make any difference, at

^a The ‘you’ here refers to the Eleven (see verse 16), so they were to pass down all the commands that Jesus had given them. To be a disciple of Jesus you should do everything that Jesus had commanded the Eleven to do—this includes healing and casting out demons, as well as preaching the Gospel.

^b Since the age has not ended, Jesus is still with us. Praise God!

^c Kind reader, can you name even one local church, in the whole country, that teaches this meaning for this baptism? What a shame!

^d The Greek manuscripts are divided as to the name here: 35%, including the best line of transmission, have ‘the Lord Jesus’; 57% have ‘the Lord’; 8% have ‘Jesus Christ’. None of the variants refers to the Trinity.

least in the spiritual realm. The important thing is the nature of the transaction in the spiritual realm, not the material substance used. But consider the baptism of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:18). At that time there was no plumbing in the houses; any water had to be carried into the house. In the house where Saul was staying, in Damascus, there was certainly no swimming pool, and almost as certainly, no tank of sufficient size to handle a grown man (and even if there was, the owner would not want to have his water contaminated). We may be certain that Ananias used a small amount of water.^a The same can be said about the dwelling of Cornelius (Acts 10:48)—not much water for a lot of people. The same can be said about the house of the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:33)—not much water for a lot of people. In short, the important thing is the spiritual transaction, not the substance or the manner.

3) In 1 Corinthians 12:12 Paul uses the figure of the members of a body to speak of the Church, and goes on with verse 13: “For we also were all baptized into one body by one Spirit—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and were all given to drink into one Spirit.” I take Galatians 3:26-28 to be about the same baptism: “So all of you are sons of God through the faith in Christ Jesus. 27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ 28—there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no ‘male and female’;^b all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”^c I take it that Paul is saying that the Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ. But how so? When and how would it happen? It would be simultaneous to the moment when Jesus baptizes a person with the Holy Spirit.

Due to a basic human limitation, language is linear—it is impossible to say everything at the same time; the relevant information must be given a piece at a time. Something complex, like the spiritual transformation of a human being, can, and should, be described from different angles or perspectives. When we believe into Sovereign Jesus we receive the Holy Spirit; but at the same time we are introduced into His ‘body’ here on earth, which is the Church. And it is the presence of the Holy Spirit within us that is the proof that we belong to Jesus and are part of that ‘body’—Paul describes that proof as a baptism. A ‘baptism in the Spirit’ as being a second, or third, ‘work of grace’, is simply not in the Text. What there is, indeed, are repeated fillings—the more, the better.

4) Due to the limitation that language is linear, it seems to me that in Romans 6:2-4 Paul deals with yet another aspect of the spiritual transformation that we receive in Christ. He insists on the necessity of a holy life, using the argument that we were in Jesus when He died, and so we died too, and a corpse shouldn’t sin. But since the physical body of Jesus was buried and then raised, we were too, and now we have access to the power of God to enable us to live differently. To cover all that Paul used the phrase, “baptized into Christ Jesus”, which probably refers to what the Holy Spirit does, as discussed in the prior item. I take Colossians 2:11-12 to be parallel to Romans 6:2-4.

^a In Acts 22:16 Paul himself mentions that experience; he cites Ananias as saying, “and wash away your sins, invoking the name of the Lord”. By invoking the Lord, he was placing himself under His protection, which equals believing into Him, which was what took care of his sins, not the baptism.

^b The Text does not have ‘neither male nor female’; the formula changes, as I have indicated. I suppose that the reference is to Genesis 1:27, and to the reason for the female in Genesis 2:18. All are saved on the same basis.

^c The reference is to the spiritual realm, not the physical—a Jew who believes into Jesus does not stop being a physical Jew, a slave who believes into Jesus does not automatically change social status, a male who believes into Jesus does not stop being a physical male. Obvious.

5) 1 Corinthians 15:29 has given no end of exercise to commentators, and also translators. Most versions just put baptized ‘for the dead’, but does that mean ‘on behalf of the dead’, or ‘in favor of the dead’, or ‘because of the dead’, or ‘in the place of the dead’? The context is the king of interpretation, and the context here is the reality of resurrection. If there is no resurrection, then our faith is in vain, we are suffering needlessly. I would say that the intended meaning is ‘in the place of the dead’; that is, new converts occupying the space left by those who had died—in those days there were many martyrs. If there is no resurrection, there would be no point to becoming a Christian, just to feed the lions. The ‘baptism’ here could include both with the Holy Spirit and with water.

6) It remains to deal with Hebrews 6:2 and 1 Corinthians 1:17. In Hebrews 6:2 ‘teaching about baptisms’ is included in the ‘elementary teaching’ (verse 1), that should be left behind so we can ‘move on toward perfection’. But since that teaching is in the company of repentance, faith, resurrection and eternal judgment, truths that form an essential part of our Faith, it is not being treated as inferior. Such doctrines are part of the foundation for spiritual growth, but that growth depends on factors beyond the basic truths.

But how could Paul say in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that “Christ did not send me to baptize”, since in the Great Commission Jesus commanded to do it? Once again, we must pay attention to the context. Beginning at verse 10, Paul is combating divisions based on individuals; there were ‘parties’, one of them following Paul himself. In an effort to reject that ‘party’, he argues that no one was baptized into his name (verse 13); and he goes on to thank God that he himself had baptized few people, precisely so that they could not say that he used his own name. Then comes verse 17: “Because Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel.” Is Paul denying that water baptism is part of the Gospel? It almost seems so. Or was he distinguishing between essential and nonessential? If we define ‘essential’ as being the elements that are necessary for someone to be saved, then water baptism is a nonessential—it joins other elements that are relevant to spiritual growth, to living the Christian life, and such elements are certainly important.

Conclusion

For us today, the one, all-important, baptism is the one where Jesus is the agent and the substance used is the Holy Spirit. The key is to believe into Jesus. When we believe into Him, He baptizes us with Holy Spirit. Anyone who has not been baptized by Jesus is not part of the Church.

7) Before, or after?

2 Thessalonians 2:2 X 2:7-8

In Matthew 24:44 we read, “Therefore you also be ready, because the Son of the Man is coming at an hour that you do not suppose.” I take it that for there to be the element of surprise the Rapture of the Church must occur before the “abomination of desolation”. When the Antichrist takes his place in the Holy of Holies and declares himself to be god there will be precisely 1,260 days until the return of Christ to the earth. “An hour that you do not suppose” presumably requires a pre-‘abomination’ rapture—if the rapture is pre-wrath but post-abomination, only a fool will be taken by surprise, unless the Rapture happens immediately after the ‘abomination’ (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

We may begin with 2 Thessalonians 2:2. Some 15% of the Greek manuscripts have ‘day of the Lord’ (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.); the 85% that have ‘day of

Christ' (including the best line of transmission) are doubtless correct. I remember one day in a Greek exegesis class, the professor stated that one reason he preferred the 'critical' text (that reads 'Lord' here) is that it fit better with his view of eschatology—the 'Day of Christ' is usually associated with the Rapture and blessing of the saints, while the 'Day of the Lord' is usually associated with heavy judgment upon the world and unrepentant Israel, including the outpouring of wrath just before and after the Second Coming of Christ, when He returns in glory to establish His Millennial Reign. The perceived difficulty here would appear to be that while verses 1, 6 and 7 evidently relate to the Rapture, verses 3-4 and 8-10 evidently relate to the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming. What to do? Look carefully at the Text. In verse 2, why would the Thessalonian believers be "disturbed"? Someone was teaching that the Rapture had already happened and they had been left behind—I would be disturbed too! So 'day of Christ' is precisely correct with reference to the content of verses 1 and 2. The trouble comes in verse 3 because a clause is elided; as an aid to the reader translations usually supply a clause, preferably in italics, to show that it is an addition, as in NKJV—"that Day will not come". But that would put the Rapture after the revelation of the man of sin and the 'abomination of desolation'—definitely not congenial to certain eschatological systems. An easy 'solution' would be to change 'Christ' to 'Lord' in verse 2, but that would put the Rapture within the 'day of the Lord'—also not congenial. I submit that fine-tuning our view of eschatology is preferable to tampering with the Text.

If the 'Restrainer' in verses 6-8 is the Holy Spirit, then the Rapture happens before the 'abomination', and may be viewed as its 'trigger'. I translate verse 7 as follows: "For the mystery of the lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He removes Himself." Perhaps more literally, 'gets Himself out of the middle' (the verb *γίνομαι* is inherently middle in voice). I would say that the Holy Spirit is the only one who satisfies the description. But if the 'Day of Christ' includes the Rapture, then verse 3 would appear to place the Rapture after the 'abomination'. So where does that leave us? Although my own training was strongly 'pre-trib', I have moved to a 'meso-trib' position. If the Rapture follows immediately upon the 'abomination', then the 'surprise' factor remains untouched. If the 'abomination' and the Rapture happen within minutes of each other, then from God's point of view they form a single 'package', and the actual sequence is not important—for all practical purposes they happen at the same time.

8) Bethsaida, or Tiberias?

Luke X John

The question is: just where did the feeding of the 5,000 men take place? Matthew 14:13 and Mark 6:32 merely say that it was in a deserted spot, without identification. But Luke 9:10 says it was in "a deserted place belonging to a town named Bethsaida",^a while John 6:23 informs us that the spot was near the town of Tiberias. Well now, Tiberias was located on the west side of the Sea, a mile or two

^a Lamentably, the eclectic Greek text currently in vogue, following a mere half of one percent of the Greek manuscripts (and that half made up of objectively inferior ones), says that they went "to a town named Bethsaida". This is an obvious perversity because two verses later the same text has them in a deserted place. So the editors of that text make Luke contradict himself, as well as contradicting the other three Gospels, since all agree that the place was deserted. Unfortunately, this perversity is duly reproduced by NIV, NASB, TEV, etc.

above the place where the Jordan River leaves the Sea. But Bethsaida was at the top of the Sea, a little to the east of where the Jordan enters the Sea. What to do?

We may deduce from Mark 6:31 and John 6:17 and 24 that Jesus and His disciples started out from Capernaum, where Jesus had His base of operations. It happens that Capernaum, like Bethsaida, was situated at the top of the Sea, but a little to the west of the entrance of the Jordan. To go from Capernaum to Bethsaida by boat one would not get far from the shore. But John 6:1 says that Jesus "went over the Sea of Galilee", and that agrees better with Tiberias, since there is a large bay between Capernaum and Tiberias, although they are both on the west side of the Sea—they crossed close to ten miles of water. Further, after the feast, Matthew 14:22 says they went by boat "to the other side", and verse 24 has them "in the middle of the Sea"; while Mark 6:45 says that they went by boat "to the other side, to Bethsaida", and verse 47 has them "in the middle of the Sea"; and John 6:17 says that they "started to cross the Sea toward Capernaum", and verse 19 that "they had rowed some three or four miles".

Well now, to stay close to the shore is one thing, to go over the Sea is another. Further, if they were already in or near Bethsaida, how could they cross the Sea in order to get there (Mark 6:45)? It becomes clear that the miracle in fact took place near Tiberias, as John affirms. But that raises another difficulty: how could a property near Tiberias 'belong' to Bethsaida (Luke 9:10)? Either it had been deeded to the town somehow, or, more likely, it belonged to a family that lived in Bethsaida. My reason for saying this is based on the Text.

John 6:17 says that they "started toward Capernaum", while Mark 6:45 says that they went "to Bethsaida". Since the two towns were a short distance apart, at the beginning of the crossing the direction would be virtually the same. I understand that they did indeed go to Bethsaida, but spent very little time there, going from there directly to Genesaret. Indeed, the day after the miracle Jesus was already back in Capernaum (John 6:24-25). But just why did they make that side trip to Bethsaida (Genesaret lies just south of Capernaum)? I imagine the following: a property near Tiberias, but belonging to someone in Bethsaida, would likely be deserted, a great place for a picnic. I suppose that Jesus had permission to use the place, when He wanted to get away, but no one had foreseen a crowd of perhaps 15,000 (5,000 men plus women and children). Please pardon the unpleasant consideration, but what effect would a crowd that size have on the hygiene and appearance of the place? I conclude that Jesus felt obligated to give a report to the owner, in Bethsaida.

While we are here, allow me to call attention to another miracle Jesus performed, that you will not find in the usual lists. As already noted, Matthew 14:24 and Mark 6:46 say that they were in the middle of the Sea, but John 6:19 is more precise, saying that they had gone perhaps four miles. It happens that a crossing from Tiberias to Bethsaida would involve about eight miles. And now, attention please to John 6:21, "Then they wanted to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going". If the total distance was eight miles, and they had only managed half of it, then Jesus transported the boat four miles instantly. Now that was a fair sized miracle, to transport a boat four miles in an instant! You will not find this miracle in most lists, because few people take the time to give a detailed examination to the Sacred Text.

9) Buy a ticket to Heaven?***Luke 16:9***

In the NKJV, Luke 16:9 reads like this: “And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home [literally, ‘the eternal dwellings’].” Within the context the Lord is clearly using irony, or sarcasm. In the immediately preceding verse the owner’s ‘commendation’ of the stupid steward is obviously sarcastic, since the steward was sacked. And verse 14 below indicates that what Jesus said was for the benefit of the Pharisees, who were greedy. The use of sarcasm is not rare in the Bible. Getting into the eternal dwellings does not depend on ‘buying’ friends down here; it depends on pleasing the Owner up there. And who says someone who can be bought with ‘unrighteous mammon’ is going to Heaven? He would have to get there first in order to ‘receive’ the buyer. The whole ‘scene’ is patently ridiculous. Just by the way, verse 13 declares a terribly important truth. To embrace the world’s value system (humanism, relativism, materialism) is to reject God. Materialistic ‘Christians’ are really serving mammon (‘mammon’ includes more than just money).

10) Buy cleansing?***Luke 11:41***

In the NKJV, Luke 11:41 reads like this: “But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you.” My translation reads like this: “Nevertheless, give what is possible as alms; then indeed all things are clean to you.” At first glance this statement seems difficult, but because they were filled with greed, for them to give away as much as possible would represent a major change in their values. Zacchaeus offers a case in point: the Lord Himself declared that he was saved (Luke 19:8-9).

11) ‘Cainan’ #2***Luke 3:36 X Genesis 11:12***

"35 of Serug, of Reu, of Peleg, of Eber, of Shela, 36 of Cainan, of Arphaxad, of Shem, of Noah, of Lamech,"

There are several spelling variations that together are attested by almost 1% of the MSS: 99% have *Καιναν*. Apparently only two omit, P^{75v} and D, but no printed text follows their lead. So there is no reasonable doubt that Luke in fact wrote that Shelah was fathered by Cainan, not Arphaxad. This Cainan has been widely used to justify treating the genealogies in Genesis like accordions—if one name was demonstrably left out in the Genesis account, then who knows how many others were also left out. This Cainan is also used to deny the validity of constructing a strict chronology based on the time spans given in the genealogies.

But where did Luke get this information? The LXX contains Cainan in Genesis 11:12, but is so different from the Massoretic text here that it looks like fiction. Recall that the LXX we know is based on codices Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus, produced centuries after Luke. It is more likely that our LXX is based on Luke than vice versa. Where then did Luke get it? I understand that Luke obtained the information about this Cainan from records existing in his day, and being correct information was led by the Holy Spirit to include it in his Gospel. Just like Jude, who quoted Enoch—Enoch’s prophecy must have been in existence in

Jude's day, but we have no copy in Hebrew today (though Jews are reported to have used one so recently as the 13th century A.D.); similarly we have no copy of Luke's source.^a

This brief note was inspired by the discussion of the subject given by Dr. Floyd N. Jones in *Chronology of the Old Testament*^b (which book comes close to solving all the alleged numerical discrepancies in the OT, at least as I see it). However, the explanation that follows is original with me (if anyone else has proposed it, I am unaware). Let us recall the exact wording of Genesis 11:12-13. "Arphaxad lived thirty-five years and begot Salah; after he begot Salah, Arphaxad lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters."

The verb 'begot' requires that Salah be a blood descendent of Arphaxad, not adopted. He could be a grandson, the son of a son of Arphaxad, or even a great-grandson, etc., except that in this case the time frame only has room for one intervening generation. The plain meaning of the formula in the Text, 'W lived X years and begot Y; after W begot Y he lived Z years,' is that W was X years old when Y was born, is it not?^c I take the clear meaning of the Hebrew Text to be that Arphaxad was 35 years old when Salah was born, whatever we may decide to do about 'Cainan'.

Let us try to imagine the situation in the years immediately following the Flood. After the Flood the 'name of the game' was to replenish the earth. Indeed, the divine command was: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 9:1). So, whom could Noah's grandsons marry? Obviously their cousins, Noah's granddaughters. There would be an urgency to reproduce—thus, the girls would be married off at puberty, and the boys would not be wasting around either. The women would be giving birth as often as they possibly could. Really, the absolute top priority would be to increase the number of people.

Arphaxad was born two years after the flood, but his wife could have been born a year or two earlier. (The Sacred Text is clear to the effect that only eight souls entered the ark, but some of the women could have conceived during the Flood.) Thus, Arphaxad could have fathered "Cainan" when he was 17/18. Similarly, Cainan could have fathered Salah when he was 17/18. In this way Arphaxad could be said to have "begotten" Salah when he was 35. Cainan could have died early or been passed over in Genesis because the time span did not constitute a 'generation', or both. Or, as things got back to normal, culturally speaking, the

^a Let us recall Luke's stated purpose in writing: "It seemed good to me also, most excellent Theophilus, having taken careful note of everything from Above, to write to you with precision and in sequence, so that you may know the certainty of the things in which you were instructed" (Luke 1:3-4). Given his stated purpose in writing, Luke's account needs to be historically accurate (cf. 2:2 and 3:1). So then, I take it that the Holy Spirit guided Luke to include Cainan #2; I will argue the same for Joram below. While I am on this tack, my solution to the 'Jeremiah' problem in Matthew 27:9-10 is similar. Daniel (9:2) refers to "the books" (plural) in connection with Jeremiah the prophet. So I assume that Matthew had access to other writings of Jeremiah, of which no copy survives.

^b *Chronology of the Old Testament: A Return to the Basics* (Floyd Nolen Jones, The Woodlands, TX: Kings Word Press, 1999, pp. 29-36). (This is the 14th edition, revised and enlarged—the 1st came out in 1993.) I imagine that many readers may feel uncomfortable with the author's very dogmatic way of expressing himself, but I would urge them to filter out the rhetorical style and concentrate on the substantial arguments, that are of extraordinary value. For example, his solution to the conundrum of the reigns of the kings on the two sides of the divided monarchy is simply brilliant, and to my mind obviously correct, leaving no loose ends. (In this connection, he debunks the claims of Edwin R. Thiele and William F. Albright.)

^c It follows that this formula destroys the 'accordion' gambit. There were precisely 130 years between Adam and Seth, 105 between Seth and Enosh, 90 between Enosh and Cainan¹, etc., etc.

haste with which Arphaxad and Cainan procreated might have been viewed as unseemly. The expedient of omitting Cainan would make the account more 'normal' while preserving precision as to the elapsed time.

But Luke would be correct in saying that Salah was "of" Cainan who was "of" Arphaxad. Salah was Arphaxad's grandson. In any case, the Messianic line was passed on by Salah. Without Luke's record I, for one, would never have stopped to consider what must have happened immediately following the Flood—the absolute priority must have been to increase the number of people.

12) 'Censer', or 'altar of incense'?

Hebrews 9:4

What concerns us here is the Greek word, θυμιατηριον, that occurs only here in the NT. In the LXX the meaning of the word is 'censer', and that is plainly the intended meaning here. But unfortunately modern versions like NIV, TEV, LB, NASB, etc. render 'altar of incense', thus setting up a contradiction with the Old Testament. [What could have motivated such a perverse proceeding?] According to Exodus 30:6 the altar of incense was placed in front of the curtain leading into the Holy of Holies, and so it was in the Holy Place, not the Holy of Holies. The only reference to this particular censer appears to be in Leviticus 16:12, where it was to be used behind the second curtain to hide the Ark with smoke. Since that censer would only be used once a year (on the day of atonement), it may well have been stored just behind a corner of the second curtain (where the high priest could retrieve it without looking in) and thus the author of Hebrews would be correct in saying that the censer was behind the second curtain, whereas the altar was in front of it. In any event, evidently that censer was **used** only within the Holy of Holies, and so it would be appropriate to say that the area 'had' a golden censer.

13) Demonization

Strange as it may seem, our versions of the Bible mislead us on this subject. The noun 'demon' is simply a transliteration of the Greek *δαμονιον* or *δαμων*. I wish they had done the same thing with the corresponding verb, *δαμονιζω*. In that event we would have the verb 'demonize'. But no, the translators put 'possessed' of a demon. As a result we have tended to think of demon activity only in terms of possession. Well, so what is the problem? I suggest the following.

By 'possession' the translators presumably intended to connote 'control', but the more common meaning denotes 'ownership', and most people seem to take the second meaning. This has serious consequences. First, the concept is wrong, since demons do not and cannot 'own' human beings (although a demon will often claim that its victim "belongs" to it).^a Second, it has fostered a misunderstanding about Christians and demon 'possession'—since a believer belongs to God it is presumably impossible that a demon should own him as well. We need to stop using the word 'possessed' in this connection altogether and replace it with the more precise term 'controlled'.

Demon control certainly exists, but it represents only a small part of the enemy's activity against mankind, precisely the most extreme cases. (Although

^a Within Satanism there are 'robots', people who have turned themselves over to the complete control of a demon. For practical purposes a 'robot' is owned by his demon.

organic insanity does exist it would not surprise me to verify that most cases of insanity involve at least some demonizing.) The vast majority of the demons' attacks should not be characterized as control. There are less severe forms that are sometimes called oppression or obsession. They also cause physical problems. But I believe that the most frequent attacks interfere with our minds in less obvious ways; so much so that most of the time we are not even aware of it. I suggest that we use the term 'demonization' to refer to any and all direct interference, whether in the mind or the body. The following continuum will help us to visualize the concept:

minds | bodies | obsession | oppression | control

Note that I have not included temptation to evil in this continuum. What is included in the concept of demonization, however, encompasses a world of suffering.

Let us now consider some consequences of the translation "possessed". I am not sure how far that rendering is at fault, but 'traditional' churches and schools scarcely touch the subject; perhaps because they think only in terms of ownership and conclude that believers are exempt. Whatever the explanation, you could attend certain churches during 20 years and never hear any teaching on Satan and the demons. On the other hand, 'pentecostal' or 'charismatic' churches and schools do at least deal with the subject, even if only partially. During deliverance sessions they tend to deal mainly with cases of control—is that not so? When does the leader of the service expel a demon? Only when it manifests itself—right? Someone begins to scream, foam at the mouth, roll on the ground or give some other evidence of foreign control, at which the leader confronts the demon and commands it to leave. But if the demon keeps still, what happens? Nothing, usually—nobody bothers it; its presence is not discerned. I know that some order the demons to show themselves, but do all obey? How do we know? Or if the manifestation is not of a type that we recognize as 'possession', who will identify and repel it? It seems clear to me that even in the churches where there is expulsion of demons the greater part of the enemy's activity against us goes unrecognized. They are focusing only on control.

I see another consequence that can be rather serious. When we conceive of demonic activity only in terms of ownership, and when a church teaches that a believer cannot be 'possessed', the following occurs. A believer is demonized. In terms of the continuum I am suggesting it is not a case of control, yet the person knows he is being attacked. But the only terminology he knows for talking about demonic attack is 'possession' and the church teaches that a believer cannot be 'possessed'. So the person is plunged into anguish—he knows he is saved but a believer cannot be 'possessed'; yet he is being attacked and knows it. What is the explanation and how can he escape? He cannot say anything to the church because if he admits that he is being 'possessed' then they will no longer accept him as a believer. He does not dare talk and so he cannot receive help. Even if he did talk, he would not receive adequate help because the leaders think only in terms of ownership. As a result of all that, the poor believer may even reach the point of doubting his salvation! The worst of it all is that such suffering is simply unnecessary. We must learn to speak in terms of demonization, understand that believers certainly are demonized, and explain the use of the spiritual weapons that are at our disposal.

14) Did Jesus hide?

John 8:59

In the NKJV, John 8:59 reads like this: “Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.” My translation reads like this: “Then they picked up stones to throw at Him;^a but Jesus was concealed and went out of the temple, going through the middle of them; yes, that is how He got away!” The familiar “hid Himself” is not the best rendering here. Jesus did not try to hide behind a pillar, or whatever. He was surrounded by angry Jews with stones in their hands. Obviously they would have seen Him and started stoning. He became invisible and simply walked out, passing right through the middle of them. About half a percent of the Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality (demonstrably so), omit “going through the middle of them; yes, that is how He got away” (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.). The 99.5% are doubtless correct, and supply an important detail.

15) Did the centurion leave his house?

Luke 7:1-10 X Matthew 8:5-13

It has often been supposed that these are parallel accounts of the same incident. To be sure, both involve a centurion, in Capernaum, a sick servant, and the statement of the centurion along with the Lord’s reaction are very similar. But other details simply do not match. Evidently the Romans had an army base in Capernaum, with a centurion as commanding officer, who could be rotated. [Where do you suppose Peter sold most of his fish? And what language did he use?] Looking at the sequence of events in both Matthew and Luke, I would say that the incident recorded by Matthew happened first, and a number of months before the one recorded by Luke. Of course an incident like that would become part of the ‘folklore’ of the base. I assume that the centurions were different, but they certainly knew each other, so the second one knew every detail of the first incident. When his turn came, he used a different strategy to make his appeal (he was asking for a second favor), but then repeated the statement that had impressed Jesus so favorably. So, the first centurion left his house, but the second did not.

16) Did the cross kill Jesus?

John 10:18 X Mark 15:39, John 19:30, Matthew 27:50, Luke 23:46

In the NKJV, John 10:17-18 reads like this: “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.” Please notice: “**No one takes it from me**”. That includes Pilate, etc. In Matthew 27:50 and John 19:30 the Text states that Jesus “dismissed His spirit”. Now consider Mark 15:39. “So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, ‘Truly this Man was the Son of God!’” Now what could convince a hardened Roman centurion? He had doubtless witnessed no end of crucifixions; he knew that the victim died of asphyxiation. Hanging from one’s hands, the diaphragm is pressed against the lungs, and the victim cannot breathe. Nailing the

^a Since certain situations demanded a stoning, there were doubtless piles of ammunition placed strategically around the temple premises.

feet was a sadistic procedure, to prolong the agony—in spite of the pain, the victim would push up so he could get a breath, until finally too worn out to do so. (That is why the Pharisees requested Pilate to have the legs broken; then they died within minutes.) Now then, someone who is dying asphyxiated does not give a tremendous shout; but ordinary people cannot just tell their spirit to leave. So when that centurion observed that Jesus gave a tremendous shout and then immediately died, he drew the obvious conclusion: he was looking at a supernatural being. The cross did not kill Jesus; He gave His life voluntarily, for you and me. Thank you, Lord!

17) Did they hear the Voice, or not?

Acts 9:7 X Acts 22:9

In the NKJV, Acts 9:7 reads like this: “And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.” And Acts 22:9 reads like this: “And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of him who spoke to me.” Comparing the two accounts, we seem to have a discrepancy: did they hear the Voice, or didn’t they? Comparing the verses in the Greek Text, we discover that the verb, ‘hear’, and the noun, ‘voice’, are the same in both. Looking more closely, however, we notice that in 9:7 the noun is in the Genitive case, while in 22:9 it is in the Accusative. We have here a subtlety of Greek grammar: in the Genitive ‘voice’ refers to sound, while in the Accusative it refers to meaning, to the words. Saul’s companions heard the Voice, but were not allowed to understand the words—only Saul understood the words. A similar thing happened in John 12:28-29; the people heard the sound (sufficiently impressive that they called it thunder), but only Jesus understood the words.

18) Divorce and remarriage

The reason for divorce is to legalize or 'legitimize' another marriage. It also serves to escape from the commitment. Before proceeding, it must be made clear that a man having more than one woman did not represent adultery, as long as he maintained them all. Many men in O.T. had more than one wife, without being condemned for it. Men want divorce, but what is the teaching of the Bible? A basic rule of correct hermeneutics is to start with the clear texts and then look at any texts that are ambiguous, or that offer some complexity. So that is what I will do.

1) "Keep yourselves in your spirit, and let no one be disloyal to the wife of his youth. Because the LORD, the God of Israel, says that he hates divorce" (Malachi 2:15-16). Here we have a solemn declaration - the LORD hates divorce. So how could He approve it? He may tolerate it, just as He tolerates sin. In fact, I suppose there is no such thing as a divorce without sin. In the circumstances that culminate in divorce there is always sin.

2) Luke 16:18 presents us with the basic way in which God sees the issue, since it is a declaration made by Sovereign Jesus: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery". If the one who marries a divorced woman "commits adultery", it is because the first marriage still exists in the eyes of God. But the use of the word 'adultery' by the Sovereign makes the matter very serious, since in the Law of Moses adultery carried the maximum penalty (Leviticus 20:10).

3) Answering the Pharisees in Mark 10:2-5, the Lord Jesus clarified that Moses allowed men to repudiate a wife "because of the hardness of your hearts". Neither here, nor in Matthew 19:3-9, does the idea of an 'innocent party' appear.

Divorce is generally based on hardness of heart—to this day. **However**, there are cases where separation is necessary to avoid premature death, but not to remarry.

4) "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will be turned into one flesh'. . . . Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate." Mark 10:7-9). In both Mark 10:9 and Matthew 19:6, the Text says "what God has joined", not "whom God has joined". It is clear that the Sovereign did not refer to people, but to the fact of 'one flesh'. So, for someone to argue that his partner was not chosen by God, won't work. It is the fact of sexual union, not the identity of the partners, that is being discussed. See also 1 Corinthians 6:16.

It is clear that the ideal that God states is monogamy—"his wife" is singular, "the two" can only refer to one man and one woman. (It is "two", not three, four, five, etc. "The two" cannot refer to two men, a man with an animal, a woman with a demon, or whatever—it cannot.) When a man and a woman unite, they become "one flesh", and God holds that union to be sacred—"therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate". Anyone! Even the spouses themselves. Here is a clear prohibition against divorce. Even the spouses themselves cannot separate what God has joined together. In fact, it seems clear that nothing that can happen afterwards alters the fact that the union took place – "one flesh" was made, and it remains. Other eventual unions complicate the situation (sin always complicates), but are unable to make the first union non-existent. That is exactly why God calls other unions "adultery"—if the first union had been annulled, the word 'adultery' would no longer be applicable, since the word refers precisely to infidelity to a union that still exists.

5) This is what Jesus says in verses 11 and 12 (still Mark 10): "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if a woman divorces her husband and gets married to another, she commits adultery." In Luke 16:18 the woman is presented as passive—she is left, then taken by another. Here (verse 12) she is presented as taking the initiative—she is the one who divorced her husband. Conclusion: whether it is the man or the woman who takes the initiative, at the moment when she is united with another, she adulterates, because the first union still exists.

6) In Matthew 5:27-28 we read this: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Of course, adulterating in the heart does not undo the first union, and adulterating in fact does not undo it either. Matthew 5:31-32 repeats material that we have already commented on, but adds the caveat, "except for a case of fornication". Since the caveat is repeated in Matthew 19:9 and the context there is broader, I will comment on it within the context of Matthew 19:3-10, as follows.

7) The Pharisees came to Jesus asking, "Is it permissible for a man to divorce his wife for *just* any cause?". In reply, Jesus appealed to the Creator's purpose, namely, monogamy, and repeated the prohibition against divorce, "what God joined together, let man not separate" (including the spouses themselves, presumably). But they didn't like that and trotted out the "certificate of divorce" spoken of by Moses. Then Jesus replied: "Because of your hard-heartedness Moses permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so." Notice, "Moses permitted", but that was not the Creator's idea, and Moses permitted "because of your hardness of heart" (no 'innocent party'). So far we haven't found anything to say that God condones divorce, but let's go to the 'caveat'.

8) "And I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication, and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries a divorcee commits adultery." The key issue is the exact meaning of "fornication". In the New Testament, the term refers to prostitution (it would be the central meaning), premarital sex, incest and homosexuality. There is no clear case to defend the meaning of 'adultery'. In fact, in Matthew 15:19, Mark 7:21, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Galatians 5:19, 'fornication' and 'adultery' are presented as different, distinct things and it would be surprising if the Holy Spirit were to later confuse the two. In the present case (Matthew 19:9) it would be like insulting the Holy Spirit to say that "fornication" has only the meaning of 'adultery'—it would be to impute dishonesty to Him, or at the very least to say that He intended to confuse the reader. If the desired meaning was 'adultery', then the Author would have written 'adultery'. Indeed, by saying "fornication" Jesus made clear that the marriage had not yet taken place, otherwise He would have said 'adultery'.

That is exactly why it seems to me more likely that this is a case similar to Joseph's dilemma with Mary, pregnant, but not by him. In the culture of that time, once promised in marriage, a woman was considered to belong to the groom, even before the actual marriage and the consummation of the physical union. If, before the actual wedding, it was proved that the bride was no longer a virgin (as a result of fornication, inevitably), normally the groom would break off the marriage, refusing to actually marry her. The bride would be repudiated, and if the man later married another there would be no adultery, for he had never been sexually united with the first one. If another man later married the repudiated bride, it would not be adultery, because although no longer a virgin, she did not get married. In fact, Matthew 19:9 does not contradict Luke 16:18 and Mark 10: 11-12; the three passages are unanimous—God does not recognize divorce. Only death undoes the marital union. Infidelity complicates, but does not undo. That is why Jesus calls any second marriage 'adultery', because the first union still exists. It seems clear that the disciples understood it at the time. Consider their reaction.

9) "His disciples said to him: 'If that is the situation of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry!'" (Matthew 19:10). Come now, why so much despair? Obviously Jesus' word was very hard for them to assimilate. They were used to the ease that Moses allowed, although there were several positions at the time as to the type of thing that would justify divorce. But it seems that everyone agreed that infidelity justified repudiation—at least that. Multiplied thousands (if not millions) of men have accepted marriage, thinking of no way out unless (God forbid) because of the woman's infidelity, in the event—so that interpretation seems inadequate to explain the disciples' reaction. It follows that Jesus simply closed the door—there is no divorce that permits remarrying. Only death opens the door again. Consider what follows.

10) "Do you not know, brothers (for I am speaking to those who know law), that the law has authority over someone only as long as he lives? 2 For example, a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if the man should die, she is released from the law about the husband. 3 So then, if she should 'marry' another man while her husband is living, she will be labeled an adulteress; but if the husband should die, she is free from that law, not being an adulteress if she marries another man." (Romans 7.1-3). "While her husband is living, she will be labeled an adulteress"—no 'innocent party', no divorce; as long as the first spouse is alive, the union exists, and any additional union is characterized as "adultery." Only death breaks the union. See 1 Corinthians 7:39 as well.

11) Returning to Matthew 19, let us consider Jesus' response to the disciples' despair (verses 11 and 12): "So He said to them: 'Not all *can* assimilate this word, but those to whom it has been given. 12 For there are eunuchs who were born that way, from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were castrated by men; and there are eunuchs who castrated themselves for the sake of the kingdom of the heavens. He who is able to assimilate it, let him assimilate.'" Wow, what a strange thing to say. What in the world do 'eunuchs' have to do with divorce and remarriage? Well, do eunuchs have sexual relations? It seems clear—Jesus is saying that whoever separates from his wife should then live as a 'eunuch': no new marriage until the first spouse dies.

12) It remains to comment on 1 Corinthians 7:10-17: "Now to the married I command (not I, but the Lord): a wife is not to be separated from her husband (but if she does separate herself, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband), and a husband is not to divorce his wife" (verses 10-11). Everything is consistent—no divorce. Even in the case of separation, let them remain unmarried! This is for a believing couple, but will the rules be different for a mixed marriage? Please note that it is the Lord who orders them to remain unmarried. Then, in verse 12, Paul offers his own opinion.

13) After affirming that the believing party should never leave the unbelieving party, the apostle continues: "But if the unbeliever separates, let him separate—in such cases the brother or the sister is not enslaved, but God has called us to peace" (verse 15). If re-marriage is not allowed if a believing partner leaves (verses 10-11), with what logic can it be argued that the rule changes if the partner is an unbeliever? It simply does not follow. (Is Paul's opinion worth more than the Lord's commandment?) On the contrary, the believer is called upon to make a special effort to win the other. However, if the unbeliever is determined to leave, an effort by the believer to go along at any cost will only prolong a climate of strife, and God has called us to peace. There is nothing in the text to justify the idea that the abandoned believer is entitled to another marriage, absolutely. So much so that the apostle closes the chapter reiterating that only death frees the survivor for remarriage (1 Corinthians 7:39).

CONCLUSION: For God, there is no divorce. It is never lawful to enter into a second marriage as long as the first spouse is alive. God takes sex seriously! So much so that He decrees the death penalty for certain abuses. Any kind of incest incurs death; homosexual practice incurs death; having sex with an animal incurs death; having sex with a woman in menstruation incurs death—read carefully Leviticus 20:10-21. Why does God react so severely? I suppose it is because of the following: the last three procedures destroy the seed of the man (the first one distorts it), and it is the seed that transmits 'the image of the Creator'. He did not create sex for our pleasure, except on a secondary level, but to guarantee the continuity of the race. The main purpose of the creation is to glorify God, not to satisfy the desires of men. Any argument that relates to the pleasure or convenience of men is suspect and inadequate. Humanism increasingly invades evangelical churches, but humanism is idolatry and contrary to God. There is more; even in that severity about sex, God was foreseeing the well-being of the human race. In Malachi 2:15 we read: "Did He not make them one? . . . And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously with the wife of his youth." The word translated 'one' is *ehad*, which includes plurality within the unit. I understand that the reference is to 'one flesh'.

The responsible use of sex aims to avoid the debasement of the race – the fear of God serves for that as well.

All right, God never wanted divorce, but what to do in the face of the confusions and complications that already exist? Under the Law of Moses, which was given by God, adultery carried the death penalty for both participants (Leviticus 20:10). As a result, since death frees people, 'widows', surviving spouses, could remarry. When a society does not execute an adulterer, the way out that death would provide no longer exists.

1) The Bible never uses the expression 'to live in adultery'; it uses 'to commit adultery'. Even having an adulterous beginning, a second union also exists and is recognized by God. Perez entered the line of the Messiah although he was the product of the shameful union of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38). Prostitute Rahab became King David's great-great-grandmother despite her sordid life. The crowning example must be that of David and Bathsheba. Their union started in the most sinful and criminal way possible (adultery and murder, very cowardly, by the way), but even so God recognized it and even blessed it to the point of putting the fruit of that union, Solomon, on the throne and even allowing him to build the temple, which God honored with His Shekinah glory. That is, if someone is faithfully living with a second spouse, the phrase 'living in adultery' does not apply, even if they committed adultery at the beginning of the union. Once there is a second union, it exists as much as the first and there is no way to undo it. A second divorce does not solve anything.

2) In fact, there is a procedure that God absolutely forbids. After a woman marries a second man, she will never be able to return to the first, even if the second one dies (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). The reason given is that such a woman has already been "contaminated", and if she goes back to the first one, God considers it an "abomination". The expedient of requiring a newly converted person, who has already gone through two (or more) unions, to return to the first spouse is sadly unbiblical—it only makes things worse.

3) I know that there are horrifying cases, even of criminal abuse by one of the spouses, where separation becomes a necessity precisely to avoid the premature death of one of the parties. Violence may justify separation, but not remarriage. In my view, one of the most wretched aspects of sin is that almost always the worst consequences fall on others, often truly innocent with regard to the sin whose consequences they are suffering. We spend our lives victimizing and being victimized. What then? Can we undo or escape? Even when the case is totally tragic, unfair, disgusting? As a rule, no. The way to go is to avail ourselves of the grace of God and "run with endurance the race that is set before us . . . looking unto Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of the Faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured a cross, scorning its ignominy, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12: 2).

4) Sin is sin and sin receives punishment, but it also may receive forgiveness (except for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit). The past is beyond our reach; we cannot change it, nor can we undo our sins, but the blood of Christ can cover the past and cleanse us from sin. Qualifications for service in the Church of Christ are stated in the present tense. (And who among us would score 100% on all the qualifications?) Despite the past, God deals with us in the present based on our current reality. However, there seems to be an exception.

5) There is grace and forgiveness, but they do not free us from the consequences of our sins in this life. It is certain that there seems to be a difference between deliberate sin after being converted and what was done before. Paul

explains that although he came to the point of persecuting believers (even to death) [he was executing, not murdering—there is a fundamental difference], he achieved grace and a ministry (quite prominent, by the way) because he did it "ignorantly, in unbelief" (1 Timothy 1: 12-14). After being converted, he subjugated his body "lest I myself should be rejected" (1 Corinthians 9:27). Sin can disqualify you from ministry—this is clear from 1 Timothy 3: 1-12, among other passages. There we find "the husband of one wife". In Malachi, "the LORD hates divorce" is part of a larger context where He is punishing the priests who divorced their wives. In Malachi 2:13-14 God states that for that very reason He no longer took notice of their offerings. Everything indicates that God wants neither a priest nor a pastor who is divorced, and will retain the blessing if they persist anyway (even worse if they divorced after being converted).

19) Do we command God?

Matthew 18:18

In the NKJV, Matthew 18:18 reads like this: "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." The normal meaning of this translation is that Heaven has to follow our lead (is it not?), and there is no lack of religious communities that teach this. But really now, what possible competence might human beings have to tell God what to do? We may ask, but not command. The difficulty arises from an inaccurate translation. The tense of the Greek verb phrase here is a periphrastic future perfect, passive voice (so also in 16:18). Thus, "will have been bound/loosed" not "will be bound/loosed". We are not telling God what to do; we are to apply down here that which He has already done in heaven. (What had been just for Peter is now given to all the disciples.)

In John 5:19 the Lord Jesus stated that He could only do what He saw the Father doing. Our inability to see what the Father is doing is probably one of our worst spiritual problems—it condemns us to waste a lot of time and energy trying to do things that we shouldn't. In practical terms, when I 'bind' something and nothing happens, I conclude that it had not been 'bound' in Heaven. I tried to do something that the Father was not doing.

20) Entering, or leaving Jericho?

Luke 18:35, 19:1 X Mark 10:46 X Matthew 20:29-30

In the NKJV, Luke 18:35 and 19:1 read like this: "Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging... Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho." Luke plainly states that Jesus healed a blind man before entering Jericho (he mentions only one, but does not say that there was only one). And Mark 10:46 reads like this: "Now they came to Jericho. As He went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging." Mark plainly states that Jesus healed a blind man upon leaving Jericho (he names the blind man, referring only to him, but does not say that there was only one). And Matthew 20:29-30 reads like this: "Now as they went out of Jericho, a great multitude followed Him. And behold, two blind men sitting by the road..." Matthew plainly states that Jesus healed two blind men upon leaving Jericho.

Well now, entering is one thing, and leaving is another, so which was it? Strange to relate, it was both! The Jericho that Joshua destroyed had been rebuilt

(at least partially), and was inhabited. But in Jesus' day Herod had built a new Jericho, perhaps a kilometer away from the old one, also inhabited. So where would an intelligent beggar place himself? Presumably between the two towns. I take it that all three of the accounts before us transpired between the two Jerichos, so Jesus was leaving one and entering the other. There is no discrepancy. Luke and Mark probably give us the same incident, but what about Mathew? Besides stating that the men were two, he says that Jesus "touched their eyes", whereas according to Luke and Mark He only spoke. It is entirely probable that there was more than one beggar along that stretch of road, and any shouting could be heard for quite a ways. I take it that Matthew records a different incident. I suppose that Bartimaeus was healed first, and he shouted so loud that the two heard it all and knew what to do when their turn came.

21) Fire loves straw

1 Corinthians 3:13

The context is king of interpretation, so I begin with verses 11-15:

11 No one can lay any foundation other than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ.^a 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 the work of each will become evident; because the Day will make it clear, because it will be revealed by fire. Yes, the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If the work that anyone built endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, albeit so as through fire.

Paul is talking about the Day of Christ wherein those in Christ will be called to account. The Text plainly states that what we have done will be tested by fire. Someone who spent most of his time living for himself rather than for Christ's Kingdom will be surrounded by nice, dry straw (all that any fire could ask for!). So the angel aims the blowtorch at the straw—the fire is high, hot, but short-lived. The person is left standing in a pile of fine ash, somewhat the worse for the wear.

The price you pay for not living for Christ's kingdom is to lose your life. That is all it costs, just your life! Consider the words of Sovereign Jesus recorded in Luke 9:24-25. Let us begin with verse 23. "If anyone desires to come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross each day and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it. For what will it profit a man to gain the whole world but waste or forfeit himself?" What does the Lord mean when He speaks of losing one's "life"? One does not lose one's soul for love of Christ. Nor is the reference to being killed. Rather, Jesus has in mind the life we live, the accumulated results of our living. All that I have done up to this moment plus all that I will yet do until overtaken by death or the rapture of the Church, whichever happens first—that is the "life" that is at risk (in my own case).

Let us look at our Lord's words a little more closely. There seems to be a contradiction here—if you lose, you save; if you want to save, you lose. How can it work? The following context helps us out. In verse 26 Jesus explains verses 24-25

^a I would say that the primary reference here is to leaders of local congregations, who need to be careful how they 'build' God's 'house'. But I believe it also clearly applies to anyone whose personal life is based on Jesus Christ. Each of us will give an account of how we built our lives on that foundation. Note that we are not offered the option of changing the foundation. Anyone who attempts to do so does not belong to God.

in terms of His second coming. The parallel passage, Matthew 16:27, is clearer. "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he will repay each according to his deeds." Christ was thinking of the day of reckoning. In other words, "we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Romans 14:10) and "each of us will give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive his due according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). I understand that 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 is referring to the same occasion, the day of reckoning. After declaring that Jesus Christ is the only foundation, Paul speaks of different materials that one might use in building on it: "gold, silver, precious stones" or "wood, hay, straw". The point is, our deeds will be tested by fire. If fire has any effect upon gold or silver it is only to purify them, but its effect on hay and straw is devastating! Okay, so what?

Let us go back to the beginning. God created the human being for His glory; to reflect it and contribute to it. I suppose we may understand Psalm 19:1 and Isaiah 43:7 in this way, at least by extension. But Adam lost this capacity when he rebelled against God. For this reason the sentence that weighs against our race is that we "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But the Son came into the world to restore our lost potential. Ephesians 1:12 and 14 tell us that the object of the plan of salvation is "the praise of His glory" (see also 2 Corinthians 1:20). And 1 Corinthians 10:31 puts it into a **command**: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Now then, the point of all this is not to 'ruin' our lives, to take all the 'fun' out of them (as many seem to think). God is not being arrogant, unreasonable, too demanding. Quite the contrary—He is just trying to save us from throwing away our lives. Surely, because the glory of God is eternal (Psalm 104:31), and when I do something for His glory that something is transformed and acquires eternal value—it becomes "gold, silver, precious stones". Works done for the glory of God will go through the fire without harm. On the other hand, what is done with a view to our own ambitions and ideas is "straw". We all know what fire does to straw!

So there it is. To be a slave of Christ means to live with reference to the Kingdom; it means to do everything for the glory of God. In this way the slave "saves" his life because he will be building it with "gold and silver", which will pass through the fire at the judgment seat of Christ without loss. In contrast, the believer who refuses to be a slave of Jesus builds his life with "hay and straw", which will be consumed by the fire—and so he "loses" his life; he lived in vain; the potential that his life represented was wasted, thrown away. What a tragedy!

22) Four hundred years

Acts 7:6

Almost all of chapter 7 is occupied with Stephen's trial and defense, although it closes with his death. The high priest knows it is all a farce, but he pretends astonishment. Stephen knows he is in a kangaroo court, so he wastes no time with the ridiculous charge; he delivers a prophetic, and condemnatory, sermon. His history lesson begins with Abraham's incomplete obedience, but what concerns us here is verse 6.

7:1 Then the high priest said, "Can these things be so?" 2 So he said: "Men, brothers and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he resided in Haran, 3 and said to him, 'Leave your country and your relatives, and come into a land

that I will show you'. 4 Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and resided in Haran.^a From there, after his father died,^b *God* moved him to this land in which you now live; 5 yet He did not give him an inheritance in it, not even a footstep. He promised to give it to him for a possession, that is, to his seed after him, though he had no child.^c 6 Further, God spoke like this: that his offspring would be aliens in a foreign land—and that they would be enslaved and oppressed—four hundred years.

To begin, it will be observed that my rendering of verse 6 differs from every version that I remember seeing. For example, the NKJV has: "But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years." The NIV has: "God spoke to him in this way: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years'." And so on—the impression that all these versions give is that the descendants would spend 400 years in a single country, namely Egypt. But such an impression lands us in a quandary: 400 years in Egypt does not fit with the clear chronological statements found elsewhere in the biblical Text.

Stephen cites Genesis 15:13, which should be understood as a chiasmus, a frequent structure in the Bible:

- a. his offspring would be aliens in a foreign land
 - b. and they would be enslaved
 - b. and oppressed
- a. four hundred years.

A careful comparison of the relevant texts shows that the 400 years includes from the weaning of Isaac to the Exodus (1891 to 1491 BC). Since Jacob moved to Egypt in 1706, Abraham's descendants were aliens in Canaan for 185 years; then they were aliens in Egypt, where they came to be enslaved, for 215 years. (The Exodus was 144 years after Joseph's death, so the period of slave labor was presumably somewhat less, perhaps around 100 years.)

For a detailed discussion and defense of the dates and time frames given above the interested reader is referred to a book that I consider to be one of a kind: *Chronology of the Old Testament: A Return to the Basics*, by Floyd Nolan Jones, ThD, PhD. The first edition appeared in 1993; I have in hand the 14th edition, published in 1999 by KingsWord Press, The Woodlands, Texas. The relevant discussion is on pages 58-61, but I venture to suggest that anyone who reads the whole book will consider that it was time well spent.

^a But he took his father and a nephew along, and Haran was not that land. 'Our father Abraham'—the Jews began their history with Abraham, who started out with incomplete obedience.

^b There went fifteen years of his life. And he took his nephew Lot along, who would be a **big** headache (he fathered the Moabites and the Ammonites—not good news—under circumstances that would not have happened had he been left in Haran).

^c Abraham was 100 when he begot Isaac, who was 60 when he begot Jacob and Esau. Abraham died at 175, so lived to see his two grandsons. But before Isaac there was Ishmael . . .

23) ‘Gall’, or ‘myrrh’?***Matthew 27:34 X Mark 15:23***

In the NKJV, Matthew 27:34^a reads like this: “they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink.” And Mark 15:23^a reads like this: “Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink.” That Mark used a generic term, ‘wine’, for the more precise ‘sour wine’ (or ‘wine vinegar’), need not detain us. But what was the mixture? ‘Gall’ is one thing, an animal substance, and ‘myrrh’ is another, a vegetable substance; it was either one or the other, but which? Was Matthew influenced by Psalm 69:21? “They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” (Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience, and seems to have mentioned fulfilled prophecy whenever he could.) More to the point, perhaps, is Acts 8:23, where Peter says to Simon (the ex-sorcercer), “for I see that you are in a gall of bitterness” (so the Greek Text). Evidently ‘gall’ was used as a generic term for any bitter substance. I take it that Matthew, perhaps influenced by Psalm 69:21, used the generic term. I conclude that the precise substance used was myrrh, as Mark indicates.

24) Hades is not Hell

This is clear from Revelation 20:14-15—“And Death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death, the Lake of Fire.^a 15 And if anyone was not found written in the Book of Life he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.”^b Death and Hades are treated as if they were living entities. However that may be, it is clear that Hades and the Lake are distinct. So just what is this ‘Lake’?

In this same passage it is stated to be ‘the second death’. But consider Revelation 20:10—“And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the Lake of Fire and brimstone, where the Beast and the False prophet also are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” The full title, Lake of Fire and brimstone, having been given in verse 10, in verses 14 and 15 it is shortened to Lake of Fire, but the place is the same, a place of eternal torment. (See also Revelation 21:8.) And now consider Matthew 25:41—“Then He will also say to those on His left: ‘Go away from me, you accursed ones, into the eternal fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels.’” In verse 46, ‘those on His left’ are sent into “everlasting punishment”. The Lake of fire was prepared for Lucifer (now Satan) and those angels that joined his rebellion (about a third of the angelic beings—Revelation 12:4). Human beings who side with Satan (there are various ways of doing that) will also share his destiny. The term ‘Hell’, properly understood and utilized, stands for the Lake of Fire and brimstone, the second and eternal death.

The name ‘Gehenna’ is a euphemistic metaphor for the Lake of Fire. Versions generally, and correctly, render it as ‘hell’. The word occurs in Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9 and 23:15, 33; in Mark 9:43, 45, 47; in Luke 12:5 and in James 3:6. In all but the last instance the word was spoken by Jesus Himself. In three of the references Jesus added “of fire”. Strictly speaking, ‘Gehenna’ was the local dump outside Jerusalem—something was always being burned, and there would be plenty of worms. Notice Mark 9:43-44.

^a The first death is the physical one; the second is the spiritual one—eternal separation from the Creator, the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9); the essence of death is separation. In physical death, the spirit is separated from the body.

^b That is right; since no one can be saved by his works, the only way out is the Book of Life!

43 Further, if your hand is causing you to fall, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into the Life maimed than having both hands to go away into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire—44 where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched’.^a

I find the figure of an immortal worm to be rather daunting—always chewing on you, but never finishing you off! I freely confess that I prefer never to encounter such a worm! The Lord was presumably referring to Isaiah 66:24. Notice also what He said in Matthew 10:28—“And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear the One who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell [Gehenna].” The destruction of both soul and body must refer to the Lake of Fire, the second death.

The Lord used other expressions to refer to the Lake. In Matthew 13:41-42 He was explaining the parable of the wheat and tares:

41 The Son of the Man will send out His angels,^b and they will collect out of His kingdom everything that is offensive, and those who perpetrate lawlessness;^c 42 and they will throw them into the furnace of fire. There, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“The furnace of fire”, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, is evidently a reference to the Lake. In verses 49-50, same chapter, He said the same thing. In Matthew 8:12, 22:13 and 25:30 Sovereign Jesus used the description: “the darkness farthest away; there, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”. See also Jude 13. Again, the reference is to the Lake, but what did He mean by the ‘darkness farthest away’, or farthest out? Throughout the NT the term ‘darkness’ is used to refer to Satan’s kingdom, and the Lake is the final destination of that kingdom, and therefore the ‘farthest out’. In Matthew 3:12 and Luke 3:17 the Baptizer was explaining what the Christ would do: “He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire”. In sum, the term ‘Hell’, properly understood and utilized, stands for the Lake of Fire and brimstone, the second and eternal death.

As demonstrated at the outset, Hades and the Lake must be distinct, so just what is ‘Hades’? The word occurs in Matthew 11:23 and 16:18, in Luke 10:15 and 16:23, in Acts 2:27 and 31, in 1 Corinthians 15:55 and in Revelation 1:18, 6:8 and 20:13-14. Unfortunately the AV (KJV) uniformly renders the word as ‘hell’, thereby misleading the reader and confusing the issue. Fortunately the NKJV corrects the AV at all those points; but other versions offer a mixture of renderings. Looking at all the relevant contexts, Hades evidently refers to something that exists between a person’s physical death and the Lake; it must be some sort of intermediate state or place. The closest thing to an actual description is found in Luke 16:19-31.

19 “Now there was a certain rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. 20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores, who had been placed at his gate, 21 just wanting to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table—why

^a Perhaps 4% of the Greek manuscripts omit ‘into the unquenchable fire’ at the end of verses 43 and 45, and also omit verses 44 and 46 entire, to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, [TEV], etc., except that most keep ‘into the unquenchable fire’ in verse 43 (but not in verse 45). (Evidently there were those who thought that saying it once was quite enough.)

^b The angels are going to be busy.

^c I take it that the “kingdom” here is physical (not merely ‘spiritual’) and includes the whole planet, because it contains “offensive” things and “lawless” people.

even the dogs would come and lick his sores!^a 22 In due time the beggar died and was carried away to Abraham's bosom by the angels. The rich man also died and was buried.^b 23 And in Hades he looked up and saw Abraham at a distance, and Lazarus very close to him. And being in torment, 24 he called out, saying, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; because I am tormented by this flame!' 25 But Abraham said: 'Child, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus had bad things; but now he^c is being comforted, and you tormented. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can anyone from there cross over to us.' 27 Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 because I have five brothers, so that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment'.^d 29 Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them'. 30 So he said to him, 'Oh no, father Abraham—if someone from the dead should go to them, they will repent!' 31 He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone should rise from the dead'.^e

The Text does not state that this is a parable, so most probably it is not (no parable that is stated to be such employs a person's proper name). Several things in this account invite comment. *Hades* (Greek), or *Sheol* (Hebrew), is the 'halfway house' where departed spirits await the final judgment, but the results of that judgment are already known, since the saved are already separated from the lost (see Hebrews 9:27). There is a chasm separating the two sides that cannot be crossed, but evidently one side can see and hear the other (the 'dead' are conscious and have feeling). People in prison who are waiting for their trial are already suffering.

In verse 22 the side of the saved is called 'Abraham's bosom'. This is the only passage where that phrase occurs; in Luke 23:43 the Lord Jesus called it 'Paradise'.^f When He said to the repentant robber, "Today you will be with me in Paradise", He was not referring to Heaven. We can deduce this from Acts 2:27. Peter is proving the resurrection by citing David's prophecy in Psalm 16:8-11; Acts 2:27 translates Psalm 16:10—"You will not abandon my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see decay". 'Hades' is a translation of the Hebrew *Sheol*, that I will discuss below. Jesus could not be abandoned there unless He did in fact go there. Referring to the sign of the prophet Jonah, Jesus said, "so will the Son of the Man

^a In fact the dogs were doing him a favor, since canine saliva is good for sores.

^b Note the contrast. Of course the beggar's body had been buried, but the person was taken to Paradise. Here we have an explicit statement of angelic activity, which, however, is absent from the rich man.

^c The best line of transmission (30% of the Greek manuscripts here) has the emphatic pronoun 'he', rather than 'here'.

^d I find it interesting that he was concerned for his brothers; we cannot say, "Better late than never", since it made no difference.

^e Abraham states a disquieting reality: people who reject God's written revelation are self-condemned. Note also that Abraham did not say it would be impossible to send Lazarus, only that it would do no good. But it is clear that the lost cannot return, or the rich man could have gone himself.

^f The basic meaning of the term 'paradise' is a garden, and in the NT it is also used of heaven. So why did Jesus call the good side of Hades 'Paradise'? I suppose because the people there were on their way to Heaven, and were already experiencing bliss.

be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Mathew 12:40). “In the heart of the earth”—presumably we here have instruction from the Lord on the location of Hades—it is inside the earth, somehow. Compare 1 Samuel 28:13 where Samuel (literally), returning from Hades/Sheol, comes up from inside the earth. If volcanoes can spew out molten rock, it is evidently quite hot down there.

Matthew 11:23 and Luke 10:15 are parallel, referring to Capernaum: “And you, Capernaum, who are ‘exalted to heaven’, will be brought down to Hades”. Hades is contrasted to heaven (the Text has ‘the heaven’), one being ‘up’ and the other ‘down’. Capernaum is pictured as having a high opinion of itself, an opinion that God does not share. Comparing this with Luke 16:23, the bad side of Hades is in view. The bad side is also in view in Matthew 16:18. “And I further say to you that you are a stone, but on this bedrock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not withstand her.” There is a play on words here, *petros* VS *petra*—the bedrock was obviously not Peter. The bedrock presumably has to do with the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. ‘Gates’ do not attack, but are the last line of defense for a walled city—it is the Church that is attacking Hades. (The normal meaning of the verb here is ‘prevail’, which is why versions usually render ‘prevail against’, as if it is Hades that is attacking the Church.) I take it that the Church is viewed as saving people from the bad side of Hades—of course it is actually Jesus who does the saving.

In 1 Corinthians 15:55 and the four cases in Revelation, death is mentioned along with Hades. I begin with 1 Corinthians 15:54-56:

54 So whenever this corruptible puts on incorruption and this mortal puts on immortality, then this written word will happen: “Death has been swallowed down into victory”. 55 “Where, O Death, is your sting? Where, O Hades, is your victory?”^a 56 The stinger of death is sin, and the adjunct of sin is the law.

The first quote is from Isaiah 25:8. It is important to note that this whole paragraph is addressed to “brothers” (verse 50), those who enjoy the benefit of Christ’s victory over sin and death. The second quote appears to be an interpretation of Hosea 13:14.^b “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Sin leads to spiritual death and lands the sinner in the bad side of Hades.

In Revelation 1:18, the glorified Jesus declares His victory, in consequence of which He now holds the ‘keys of Death and of Hades’. In Hebrews 2:14, the correct translation of the Greek Text is ‘abolish the one who had the power of death’. In Revelation 6:8, a sickly pale horse is ridden by Death, ‘and Hades follows with him’. The Text does not say that Hades was on a horse. John is stating a fact of human existence: Hades follows death—so it has been for 6,000 years.

I confess that the meaning of Revelation 20:13 is not clear to me. “The ocean gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they were judged each one according to their works.”^c How can Death

^a Less than 2% of the Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality, have ‘death’, instead of “Hades”, to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.

^b The LXX is in basic agreement with the NT here, and is probably based upon it, not the opposite. The LXX we know and use is based on manuscripts copied centuries after the NT was written. A strict Pharisee like Saul of Tarsus would certainly use Hebrew manuscripts, not a translation.

^c Twice it says that they will be judged on the basis of their works. So how can you really evaluate someone’s deeds? Only by taking account of their context. Those who never heard the Gospel will be judged within the context that they lived, and the Judge will prove that even within their own context they did not measure up.

be holding dead that are not in Hades? And how can the ocean have a separate roster of dead? However, the context is the Great White Throne, the final judgment. And since only the lost will appear before this throne, proceeding directly to the Lake, they have presumably already been resurrected. In physical death, the spirit is separated from the body, and resurrection is the reuniting of spirit and body. Before resurrection, the spirits of the lost are in Hades; but where are their 'bodies'? The remains of those bodies are either in the sea or on land. If 'death' stands for those on land, then verse 13 could be referring to the resurrection of the lost. That is my best guess as to its intended meaning.

The observant reader may have noticed that after Luke 16 and Acts 2 all the references appear to be dealing with the bad side of Hades. Why might that be? I suggest that the good side is no longer occupied. I believe a case can be made for the understanding that when Jesus resurrected, He took all the good spirits with him, and the spirits of all the saved who have died subsequently are also with Jesus (but still without their glorified bodies).

I will now take up the meaning of the Hebrew *Sheol*. The term occurs some 65 times in the OT. The AV translates it as 'the grave' and 'hell' about 30 times each, the remainder being 'the pit'. Looking at the contexts, I see no reason for the different renderings. In my opinion, it should be transliterated as a proper name throughout. Since the inspired translation in Acts 2:27 equates *Sheol* with *Hades*, I take that to be the correct understanding. I say 'inspired translation' because Peter was doubtless speaking Hebrew, but the inspired account is in Greek.

To recapitulate and conclude, properly understood and utilized, 'Hell' refers to the Lake of Fire and brimstone, the second and eternal death. 'Sheol/Hades' refer to the halfway house where departed human spirits await the resurrection and the final judgment. However, since the resurrection of Christ, I believe the side of the saved, 'Abraham's bosom', is now empty.

25) Harmonizing the accounts of the betrayal and arrest

1) The crowd arrives—Matthew 26:47, Mark 14:43, Luke 22:47^a, John 18:3. The four accounts state the fact, while Luke emphasizes that Judas was leading them, also implied by John.

2) Jesus knocks them down—John 18:4-9. I take this to be a 'cyst' of supernatural intervention, to make clear that the Father has not lost control of the events. I say 'cyst' because then the crowd carries on as if nothing had happened. A person delivered from demonic control often does not remember what he did while under that control; this may have been similar, only on the other side.

3) The kiss—Matthew 26:48-50^a, Mark 14:44-45, Luke 22:47^b-48. Only three of the four accounts take up this pitiful episode. I offer the following harmonization:

Now His betrayer had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, he it is; seize him and take him away securely".^a So upon arriving he went directly to Him. So Jesus said to him, "Friend, what brings you here?"^b Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. So Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of the Man with a kiss?"

^a Why the 'securely'? Judas had seen so many manifestations of Jesus' power that he should have known better, but of course he was under Satan's control at that time. However, it appears that they expected resistance.

^b Jesus knew perfectly well why Judas was there, so why did He call him "friend"? Perhaps to show that He held no personal animosity against him. The Plan was being fulfilled.

4) They grab Jesus—Matthew 26:50^b, Mark 14:46. Judas served as guide, but I take it that Malchus was actually in charge of the operation. He may have taken the lead in grabbing Jesus, which was why Peter swung at him. This grabbing precipitated the reaction that followed.

5) Peter's sword—Matthew 26:51-54, Mark 14:47, Luke 22:49-51, John 18:10-11. All four of the accounts take up this episode. I offer the following harmonization:

When those who were around Him saw what was about to happen, they said to Him, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)^a Then Jesus reacted by saying, "Allow at least this!" and touching the man's ear He healed him.^b Then Jesus said to Peter: "Put your sword back into its place, for all who take the sword will die by the sword. Do you actually suppose that I cannot call upon my Father right now and He will place beside me more than twelve legions of angels?^c But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it has to happen this way? The cup that the Father has given me, must I not drink it?"

6) Jesus addresses the crowd—Matthew 26:55-56^a, Mark 14:48-49, Luke 22:52-53. Only three of the four accounts take up this episode. I offer the following harmonization:

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, officers of the temple, and elders who had come against Him: "Have you come out with swords and clubs as against a bandit, to arrest me? I used to sit daily with you in the temple, teaching, and you did not seize me. But all this has happened so that the Scriptures of the prophets should be fulfilled. This is your hour; even the authority of the darkness!"^d

7) The disciples run away—Matthew 26:56^b, Mark 14:50. The two accounts state the fact.

8) Jesus is taken away—Matthew 26:57, Mark 14:53^a, Luke 22:54^a, John 18:12-13^a. The four accounts state the fact. The first three are in essential agreement, but John offers some new information. First, there was a Roman detachment, with its commander, there in the garden. The word here (*chiliarch*) refers to a commander of a thousand men (or of a cohort = about 600); this could only be a Roman officer of high rank, and there would only be one of them in Jerusalem. So how did they get him to come along? Obviously Pilate had been informed and was participating. Second, they took Him to Annas first, because he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas,^e who was high priest that year. A careful look at the parallel accounts makes clear that all of Peter's denials took place at

^a The Text has 'the servant', so the high priest had probably put him in charge of the operation. John probably knew him personally. Obviously Peter was not used to wielding a sword.

^b Peter's attack caused them to release Jesus, so His hands were free to do this. If the Lord had not healed that ear, things would probably have been nastier for Peter in the 'courtyard', if not already in the garden.

^c That would be a minimum of 36,000—probably enough to handle the situation, don't you think?

^d This was Satan's hour, being part of the Father's Plan; 'the darkness' refers to Satan's kingdom; 'your hour' means that they were part of that kingdom.

^e The bigger reason was that Annas was the real high priest, according to the Law (the office of high priest was for life). He was the power behind the throne, so to say. Caiaphas was the political high priest (that year), for purposes of dealing with Rome.

Caiaphas' palace, as also all the recorded questionings, etc., so after showing Jesus to Annas they took Him on to Caiaphas. That interim was probably also used to gather the Council, who would not want to be dragged out of bed until Jesus was actually in hand—it was probably between 3 and 4 a.m.

26) Harmonizing the accounts of the burial

The relevant passages are: Matthew 27:57-61, Mark 15:42-47, Luke 23:50-56 and John 19:38-42.

1) Joseph of Arimathea was an important man in town. He was 'rich' (Matthew 27:57) and a prominent member of the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:43). Any self-respecting governor would make it his business to know who were the important people within the area of his jurisdiction, so Pilate doubtless knew who Joseph was, whether or not he had ever met him—evidently Joseph experienced no difficulty in obtaining an audience. Joseph was 'a good and righteous man' (Luke 23:50) 'who himself had become a disciple of Jesus' (Matthew 27:57), but who had not declared himself openly 'for fear of the Jews' (John 19:38).

He had been waiting in the wings. Just as with the owner of the donkey, and the owner of the upper room, who were doubtless advised in advance that their services would be needed, Joseph had been prepared. He did not just 'happen' to have a tomb he didn't know what to do with, complete with a large stone just right for sealing. Since he had the wherewithal, he had purchased the divinely indicated plot and had the tomb carved into, or out of, the sedimentary rock (Matthew 27:59, Mark 15:46, Luke 23:53). According to Isaiah 53:9, Jehovah's Servant was to have a rich man's grave, not whatever the common criminals got (the Father did not allow the Son's body to suffer that humiliation).

2) Nicodemus was a Pharisee and 'a ruler of the Jews' (John 3:1), the one who 'came to Jesus by night' (John 19:39). Since he started his interview by declaring that Jesus was 'a teacher come from God' (John 3:2), he no doubt became a disciple. Since he defended Jesus openly (John 7:50-51), his sympathies were presumably well known. He also had been prepared to assist Joseph with the burial procedure. He had purchased 'a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds' (John 19:39), which represented a significant investment, and had placed them within the tomb in time to help Joseph with the body. Although the Text does not mention it, he was presumably also the one who furnished the linen strips for wrapping the body. Obviously all preparations had to be completed before the time for the burial.

3) At the right moment, Joseph 'went boldly in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus' (Mark 15:43). As already mentioned, he was evidently given an audience without difficulty. "Well Pilate was surprised that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion he asked him when He had died" (Mark 15:44). As soon as Jesus died, the centurion most probably had left the scene, going back to headquarters (he had probably received special instruction about Jesus). He probably felt he should inform Pilate about the unusual events, but somehow Joseph got ahead of him (but evidently not by much—had the centurion arrived first, he presumably would have been already reporting to Pilate when Joseph arrived). Well, Joseph was primed for action, watching from a distance, and as soon as Jesus dismissed His spirit Joseph headed for Pilate. "Upon the centurion's confirmation, he granted the body to Joseph" (Mark 15:45).

4) Then Joseph and Nicodemus met at the cross and removed the body. Joseph had purchased a linen sheet for the purpose, and the two used it to transport the

body to the tomb (Matthew 27:59-60, Mark 15:46, Luke 23:53, John 19:39). Obviously the tomb had been prepared beforehand, as already stated. Matthew and John say that it was 'new', while Luke and John add that it had yet to be used (Matthew 27:60, Luke 23:53, John 19:41). John adds that it was in a garden near Golgotha.

5) Once within the tomb, they prepared the body for burial. "Then they took Jesus' body and wrapped it in linen strips, with the aromatic spices, according to the burial custom of the Jews" (John 19:40). How many linen strips would it take to wrap up 100 pounds of spices? The result would have looked something like a cocoon, except that it did not include the head, which was covered with a facecloth (John 20:7).

6) When they had finished their task, they 'rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb and left' (Matthew 27:60, Mark 15:46). If they rolled it, it was in the form of a wheel; there would be a track in which it rolled, with a bit of incline, so that Joseph and Nicodemus could roll it down into place, where it would stop; but it would take several men to roll it back up and away, 'because it was very large' (Mark 16:4).

7) Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses 'followed along', saw where the body was placed, and sat down opposite the tomb (Matthew 27:61, Mark 15:47, Luke 23:55). That is, they saw where the body was taken, but obviously had not looked in the tomb—there were 100 pounds of spices in there, with enough linen strips to tie it all in. This is clear from Luke 23:56, "Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes; but they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment." They evidently did not realize that the men had already done what there was to do.

8) Although subsequent to the burial itself, the guarding of the tomb is important; it is recorded in Matthew 27:62-66.

62 The next day, which is after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees went together to Pilate 63 saying: "Sir, we remember that that deceiver, while still alive, said, 'After three days I am going to rise'. 64 Therefore command that the grave be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him and say to the people, 'He was raised from the dead', and the last deception will be worse than the first." 65 So Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go make it as secure as you can!" 66 So they went and secured the grave with the guard, having sealed the stone.

Was Pilate happy? No he was not! And maybe, just maybe, he wasn't as stupid as some might like to think. From Mark 15:44-45 we know that he debriefed the centurion, who had to explain why Jesus died sooner than expected! "Make it as sure as you can." Right. Ironically, those great champions of the Sabbath had to violate the Sabbath to secure the tomb. They thought they were being shrewd, but only played into God's hand. Their effort only made the evidence for the resurrection all the stronger. Well, for starters, who removed the stone? The soldiers would not touch a stone with a Roman seal, and they had no reason for doing it, in any case. The women were physically incapable of doing it. So who removed the stone?

27) Harmonizing the accounts of the crucifixion

The relevant passages are: Matthew 27:31-56, Mark 15:20-41, Luke 23:26-49 and John 19:16-37.

1) The soldiers lead Jesus away to be crucified, wearing His own clothes (Matthew 27:27-31, Mark 15:20, John 19:16).

2) On the way they conscripted Simon, a man of Cyrene, to follow Jesus, carrying His cross (Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21,^a Luke 23:26). The soldiers had already mistreated Jesus so badly that He probably was weakened and having trouble carrying the cross, which was probably heavy.

3) Only Luke mentions Jesus' message to the 'daughters of Jerusalem' (23:27-31), which I will transcribe here:

27 A considerable crowd of people followed Him, including women who were also mourning and lamenting Him. 28 So Jesus turned to them and said: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; rather weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 Because indeed, the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, even the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'"^b 30 Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"'^c 31 For if they do these things in the 'green tree', what will happen in the 'dry'?"

If Jesus were still carrying the cross, He would not be able to 'turn' (verse 28), which is why I place this after the transferal of the cross to Simon.

4) They arrived at *Golgotha*, a Hebrew word meaning 'place of a skull' (Matthew 27:33, Mark 15:22, Luke 23:33, John 19:17).

5) The soldiers offered Him sour wine mixed with myrrh to drink, but He tasted it and then refused to drink it (Matthew 27:34, Mark 15:23).^d That was a small humanitarian gesture—myrrh is a crude anesthetic, and would deaden the pain. But Jesus refused it, so He remained fully alert on the cross and felt it all; the myrrh would have diminished the suffering.

6) The soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross and set it up. After taking care of Jesus, they also crucified two criminals, one on each side of Him (Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24-25, 27-28, Luke 23:32-33, John 19:18). Mark specifies that "it was the third hour when they crucified Him"; he was using Jewish time, which means it was 9 a.m. With reference to the two criminals, Mark adds: So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors".^e

^a After carrying the cross, Simon doubtless stayed around to see what happened. In consequence he was no doubt converted, as were his two sons.

^b For Jews to say this, things would have to get really bad.

^c See Hosea 10:8.

^d In the NKJV, Matthew 27:34^a reads like this: "they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink." And Mark 15:23^a reads like this: "Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink." That Mark used a generic term, 'wine', for the more precise 'sour wine' (or 'wine vinegar'), need not detain us. But what was the mixture? 'Gall' is one thing, an animal substance, and 'myrrh' is another, a vegetable substance; it was either one or the other, but which? Was Matthew influenced by Psalm 69:21? "They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." (Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience, and seems to have mentioned fulfilled prophecy whenever he could.) More to the point, perhaps, is Acts 8:23, where Peter says to Simon (the ex-sorcerer), "for I see that you are in a gall of bitterness" (so the Greek Text). Evidently 'gall' was used as a generic term for any bitter substance. I take it that Matthew, perhaps influenced by Psalm 69:21, used the generic term. I conclude that the precise substance used was myrrh, as Mark indicates.

^e See Isaiah 53:12. Around 11% of the Greek manuscripts omit this verse entirely, to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, [TEV], etc.

7) John 19:19 says that the board with the statement of Jesus' 'crime' was put on the cross, above His head, and the time to do that would be while it was still on the ground. When the cross was placed upright, the board was already nailed on. All four Gospels mention the 'accusation', but each one gives it slightly differently (Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38, John 19:19-22). Piecing them all together, the complete statement was: THIS IS JESUS THE NATSOREAN,^a THE KING OF THE JEWS, and it was in three languages: Hebrew, Greek and Latin.^b John adds some important information:

20 So many of the Jews read this notice, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; further, it was written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin! 21 So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Don't write, 'The king of the Jews', but that the fellow said, 'I am the king of the Jews'." 22 Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written!"

The chief priests had gotten all they were going to get out of Pilate; he was making a statement, but he was also getting back at them a little bit. (We don't know just when the Jews saw the notice, nor when the conversation took place. The board would have been prepared before the soldiers started out. It is likely that the Jews had 'observers' watching all that went on.)

8) The soldiers had to remain on the scene to prevent anyone from helping the victims, and of course they would sit down—they would be there for many hours. One of the things they did was to divide up Jesus' clothes (Matthew 27:35-36, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34, John 19:23-24). John gives some interesting detail, so I will transcribe it:

23 Now when the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took His clothes and made four parts, a part for each soldier.^c They also took His tunic, but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. 24 So they said among themselves, "Let's not rip it, but toss for it, *to see* whose it will be", so that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast a lot." That is why the soldiers did these things.

The reference is to Psalm 22:18. John seems to be affirming a cause/effect relationship. The centurion could have claimed the tunic, or whatever, but casting a lot had been prophesied. Luke 23:34 deserves special notice: Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing";^d while they were dividing up His clothes by casting a lot. Only Luke records this important statement by Jesus; I take it that the Greek grammar at this point indicates that Jesus said it while the soldiers were dividing up His clothes. I suppose that Jesus

^a That Pilate put "the Natsorean" (not Natsarene [Nazarene]) indicates that he had researched Jesus. The reference is to Isaiah 11:1: Jesus was David's Branch, the Messiah. Pilate was making a statement. For an explanation of 'Natsorean', please see the appendix at the end of this article.

^b To put all of that in three languages would require a board of fair size. But why did Pilate use three languages? One would have been enough (it was customary to put the crime over the victim's head). I take it that Pilate was **not** happy, having been bested by the Jews; and I think he was personally convinced that Jesus was a king. By putting 'this is the king of the Jews' he was making a statement, one that virtually any literate person would be able to read, given the three languages.

^c This probably means that Jesus was left without any; one final bit of humiliation.

^d The eclectic text currently in vogue (following less than 1% of the Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality) places within double brackets the first half of verse 34: "Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing'". In this way they deny that Luke wrote it, surely a perverse proceeding.

was referring precisely to those soldiers; they were simply obeying orders, and had no personal responsibility for what was happening.

9) Only three of the Gospels mention the taunting by the spectators (Matthew 27:38-44, Mark 15:29-32, Luke 23:35-37). The accounts separate the spectators from the religious leaders, who evidently did most of the taunting, but the soldiers and the two criminals are also mentioned. The religious leaders were especially nasty: “He saved others; himself he cannot save!”^a “If he is ‘King of Israel’ let him come down from the cross now and we will believe him!”^b “He trusted in God; let Him rescue him now, if He wants him; for he said, ‘I am God’s Son!’” However, they were probably demonized at the time.

10) The criminals require special mention. Matthew writes: “Even the bandits who were crucified with Him were reviling Him in the same way”, and Mark says much the same. But Luke adds an important item:

39 Then one of the hanged criminals started berating Him, saying, “If you are the Christ, save yourself and us!” 40 But the other reacted and rebuked him, saying: “Don’t you even fear God, since you are under the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward for our deeds; but this man did nothing wrong.” 42 Then he said to Jesus, “Please remember me, Lord,^c when you come in your kingdom”.^d 43 Jesus said to him, “I tell you assuredly, today you will be with me in Paradise.”^e

Evidently they both started out by reviling Him, but later one of them repented—they were on the cross about three hours before the supernatural darkness, so there was time to observe Jesus, which caused one of them to change his mind.

11) Only John records Jesus providing for His mother:

25 Now Jesus’ mother and her sister, Mary of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene were standing by His cross. 26 So Jesus, seeing His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He says to His mother, “Woman, there is your son!” 27 Then He says to the disciple, “There is your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

Notice that Jesus is still perfectly lucid. As Mary’s oldest son, He was responsible for her well-being (we understand that Joseph was gone by now), so He passes that responsibility over to the apostle John (the author of this Gospel); and John accepts it.

12) Only three of the Gospels mention the three hours of supernatural darkness (Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44-45). Matthew’s statement will do: “Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour a darkness came over all the

^a This was precisely true, but not in the sense they intended. To save us, He could not save Himself.

^b This was a lie; they already knew that Jesus was the Messiah but had deliberately rejected Him. However, if Jesus had descended from the cross (as presumably He had the power to do) we would be without hope. The people were being satanically nasty, but Jesus was totally committed to the Father’s will and thus the redemptive program was not aborted.

^c Instead of “to Jesus, ‘Please remember me, Lord’”, perhaps 3% of the manuscripts have ‘Jesus, remember me’ (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.), which seriously weakens the man’s statement.

^d I find this statement to be impressive: the man is declaring that Jesus is the Messiah and will indeed inaugurate His Kingdom. Evidently the man knew the Bible; and his request was honored!

^e For Jesus to say ‘today’, He knew the man would die before sundown, so He knew the man’s legs would be broken—otherwise he would most likely have lasted well into the night, which would have been ‘tomorrow’. ‘Paradise’ here refers to that half of Hades (Sheol in the OT) reserved for the righteous dead. Hades is the ‘half-way house’ where departed spirits await the final judgment. In Luke 16:22 it is called “Abraham’s bosom”.

land.” Matthew uses Jewish time, so it was dark between noon and 3 p.m. The darkness could not have been a solar eclipse, as some have ignorantly argued. The Passover always occurs at full moon, and a solar eclipse only occurs at new moon. Further, even a total eclipse only lasts for a few minutes, not three hours. Why the darkness? I believe the Father was protecting the Son, so no one could observe His anguish as He was “made sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21).^a

13) At 3 p.m., when the darkness was removed, Jesus gave a very loud anguished cry: “My God, my God, why have You abandoned me?”^b I take it that the Father turned His back on the Son during those three hours—to be separated from the Father is spiritual death. For Jesus to pay for my sin and yours He had to take our wages: “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23)—both physical and spiritual. The Hebrew text of Isaiah 53:9 refers to His death_g, using an intensive plural.

14) That shout gave rise to a curious situation (Matthew 27:47-49, Mark 15:35-36). Comparing the two accounts, we have an apparent discrepancy: Matthew records that others told the man to stop, while Mark records that the man told them to stop! So which is it? What I imagine is this: as both accounts state, a certain man [could it possibly have been John Mark himself?] decides to offer Jesus a drink of wine vinegar; several others, supposing that Jesus had just called on Elijah, tell him to stop; to which he retorts, “You (pl) stop!” and repeats their statement with sarcasm [anyone who really understood the language would have known that Jesus wasn’t calling Elijah at all]. However, it does appear that the man stopped his action before Jesus could drink, since a bit later Jesus says, “I’m thirsty” (John 19:28).

15) The shout of victory is recorded by all four Gospels (Matthew 27:50-52, Mark 15:37-38, Luke 23:46, John 19:28-30), but they record a variety of details. I begin with John:

28 After this, knowing that everything was now accomplished so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus says, “I’m thirsty!” 29 Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; so they filled a sponge with sour wine, placed it on a hyssop, and put it to His mouth. 30 Then, when He had received^c the sour wine, Jesus said, “Paid in full!” And bowing His head He dismissed His spirit.^d

Matthew, Mark and Luke all affirm that Jesus gave a great shout, but without giving the content. I take it that John supplies that information, although he does not mention that it was a shout. “Τετέλεστα”—that was what they wrote on bills and promissory notes when they were paid off = ‘paid in full’. When something is

^a As a side benefit, it was a mercy for the mother and close friends who were right there—how could they stand to see such suffering?

^b See Psalm 22:1.

^c From the word ‘received’ it appears that He did swallow some. Since sour wine was not used at the Passover, this does not conflict with the Lord’s statement in the upper room (Matthew 26:29) that He would not drink of “this product of the vine”. All four Evangelists mention the sour wine. There was evidently a pot/vessel full of it (the soldiers were in for many hours of vigil and that was what they drank). The mocking offer mentioned in Luke 23:36 happened before the darkness; the other three accounts after. The offer recorded in Matthew 27:48 and Mark 15:36 was triggered by Jesus’ cry, “My God, my God, . . .” The one in John 19:29-30 by His saying, “I’m thirsty”. I venture to suggest that there was an interval between His despairing cry and His statement—after the cry He may have lapsed back into silence for a bit; He was trying to make contact with the Father. It may be that the sour wine sort of ‘wet His whistle’ so He could let out His shout of victory.

^d That is right—the cross did not kill Jesus, He just told His spirit to leave. In John 10:17-18 he was very clear: no one could take His life from Him, but He could lay it down.

shouted the individual sounds can be distorted, but John was right there and could read His lips, if necessary. It was a shout of victory: “We did it!” “Finished!” “Paid in full!”^a

However, after that shout, Jesus did one more thing, as recorded by Luke: “Then, after giving a loud shout, Jesus said, ‘Father, it is into your hands that I will commit my spirit’. And having said this, He breathed out His spirit.” Jesus had the authority to dismiss His spirit, but this statement indicates that He had reestablished contact with the Father; it also constitutes a declaration of His confidence in the Father, in spite of the terrible suffering He had just been through. Matthew, Mark and Luke record that at that point “the veil of the temple was ripped in two from top to bottom!” The Father Himself ripped the veil (or ordered it done); it was His declaration that the **Price** had indeed been paid! Access to God’s presence is no longer limited to one man once a year. See Hebrews 10:19-22.

Only Matthew records that: “And the earth was shaken, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened. (And many bodies, of the saints who had fallen asleep, were raised; and coming forth out of the graves after His resurrection, they entered the holy city and were made visible to many.^b)” The earthquake was added confirmation that something supernatural was happening; even the hardened centurion was convinced.

16) Mention is made of a variety of reactions: “And the whole crowd that had gathered for the spectacle, when they saw what actually happened, went away beating their breasts”—this was a cultural expression of sorrow and distress. A number of His followers were watching from a distance. But the centurion requires special attention. Matthew writes: “Now when the centurion and those with him guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that happened they were scared stiff and said, “This *Man* really was the Son of God!” And Mark writes: “Well when the centurion, who was standing opposite Him, saw that He breathed out His spirit after giving such a loud shout,^c he said, “This man really was God’s Son!”

Any centurion would be a hardened soldier, who had seen no end of crucifixions. He knew that a cross killed by asphyxiation. Hanging from the hands pushes the diaphragm against the lungs so you can’t breathe. Nailing the feet, with the knees bent, was a sadistic procedure to prolong the agony—even though painful, the victim would push up so he could get a breath, until finally too worn out to do so. Breaking the legs would put an end to that expedient, and the person died within a few minutes, asphyxiated. Someone who is dying asphyxiated does not shout. Since Jesus gave a loud shout, but then immediately died, the centurion knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that the cross had not killed Jesus (later, when Joseph asks for the body, Pilate is surprised that Jesus could already be dead). But who can just tell his spirit to leave? Putting two and two together, the centurion concluded that Jesus was a supernatural being. Just so!

17) Only John offers the following information:

31 Now then, because it was Preparation Day, so that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the

^a Oh praise God!

^b Wow! How would you like a departed saint to knock at your door?! It would be tremendous confirmatory evidence for Christ’s resurrection. The Text does not say what happened to these resurrected saints, but to be sent back into the ground would be a real drag. It is more likely that they went with the risen Christ to heaven.

^c A mere handful (0.4%) of the Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality, omit ‘after giving a loud shout’, to be followed by NASB and LB.

Jews requested Pilate that their legs might be broken and they be removed. 32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man and of the other one who had been crucified with Him. 33 But upon coming to Jesus, they did not break His legs, since they saw that He had already died. 34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. 35 And the one who saw has testified, and his testimony is true (yes, he knows he is telling the truth), so that you may believe. 36 Because these things happened so that the Scripture should be fulfilled: “Not a bone of His will be broken.”^a 37 And again another Scripture says: “They will look on Him whom they pierced.”^b

John, the author of this Gospel, was right there, so he could see very clearly what came out of Jesus’ side—that the blood had separated was a clear sign of physical death.^c

28) Harmonizing the accounts of the post-resurrection appearances

I will attempt to discuss the appearances in chronological sequence, although the evidence available does not always permit a clear decision. The first five occurred on Resurrection Day.

1) The first appearance is related in Mark 16:9 and John 20:14-17. Mark simply records the fact, stating clearly that it was to Mary Magdalene. John gives further detail about the encounter.

2) The second appearance is recorded only by Matthew, 28:9-10. This appearance was to Mary the mother of James, Salome, Joanna and ‘the others’; the Text does not specify that it was the second, but the only other possible candidate would be Peter (Luke 24:34), and there simply was not enough elapsed time to fit him in here. According to verse 7, the disciples were to go to Galilee to see Jesus, verse 10 giving the same instruction to His ‘brothers’. In Matthew 26:32 Jesus Himself had said to them, “After I am raised I will go before you into Galilee”.

3) I arbitrarily give the third appearance to Peter, but it could have been to the Emmaus disciples—between them they are the third and fourth. The fact is mentioned in Luke 24:34 and 1 Corinthians 15:5; just the fact and no more.

4) The episode on the road to Emmaus is recorded in Mark 16:12, but related in Luke 24:13-32 (Luke’s account is most interesting).

5) The fifth, and last, recorded appearance on Resurrection Day was to the Eleven (although only ten were present), as recorded in Mark 16:14-18, Luke 24:36-49 and John 20:19-23 (1 Corinthians 15:5). I assume that Mark’s record refers to that first Sunday, although the ‘later’ that begins verse 14 could also apply to the second Sunday (the eleven at the table would presumably have to be one of the two Sundays). The content of Mark’s record seems to me to fit better with the first Sunday. Luke makes clear (verse 33) that there were others besides the Eleven in that upper room. Verse 36 makes clear that this was the first Sunday. Strictly speaking, verses 44-49 could have been uttered at a later date, but if not, then verse 49 requires special handling. “You must stay in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on High.” Since Jesus had instructed them to meet Him

^a See Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12 and Psalm 34:20.

^b See Zechariah 12:10.

^c I guess we do not need to know, really, just how the separation came about, whether by purely natural processes or with supernatural intervention; in any case, John is emphatic about what he saw.

in Galilee, and did in fact meet with them there, then this amounts to a directive to return to Jerusalem after the meeting(s) in Galilee. John's account clearly refers to the first Sunday, and provides new information, as is his custom (from him we learn that Thomas was absent). The reference to 'the Twelve' in 1 Corinthians 15:5, probably refers to the first Sunday, but could have been the second, or even in Galilee. (I take it that both 'the Twelve' and 'the Eleven' were used as technical terms referring to the apostolic 'college'.)

6) The next recorded meeting is found in John 20:26-29, taking place on the following Sunday, in the same upper room, to the complete 'Eleven'.

7) The breakfast on the beach (John 21:1-23) must be the seventh, because verse 14 states: "This was already a third time that Jesus appeared to His disciples after He was raised from among the dead." This would presumably be the first appearance in Galilee, following the two in the upper room.

8) 1 Corinthians 15:6 states that "He was seen by over five hundred brothers at once", and subsequently by James, and finally by all the apostles (verse 7). The 'finally by all the apostles' presumably refers to the Ascension. The 500 might have happened at Matthew 28:16-20, but the Text refers only to the Eleven, as well as stating that Jesus had indicated the place (and presumably also the time). The reference to doubters presumably means that there were others present, since the Eleven could scarcely still be in doubt. Jesus' half-brothers (verse 10) were probably there, as well as others (recall that Luke 24:33 mentions others besides the apostles). I will assume that the '500' happened later.

9) "Over five hundred brothers at once".

10) James.

11) The Ascension is recorded in Mark 16:9, Luke 24:50-51 and Acts 1:6-11. Mark merely states the fact. Luke gives bare detail, but he offers more information in Acts, which he also wrote.

12) Acts 1:3 has "appearing to them during forty days", and Acts 13:31 has "for many days He was seen", but no specifics are given. However, we may reasonably conclude that those forty days were not empty, there having been further appearances that were not recorded—that is to say, before the Ascension, since we do indeed have some after that event.

13) Stephen—Acts 7:55-56.

14) Saul of Tarsus—Acts 26:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15:8.

15) Ananias—Acts 9:10-15.

16) Paul, more than once—Acts 22:17-21, 23:11, etc.

17) John—Revelation 1:9-13, etc.

And Sovereign Jesus has continued appearing to people down through the ages to this very hour. As He said in Matthew 28:20, "Take note, I am with you every day, until the end of the age". Since that 'end' is still down the road, His promise continues in effect.

29) Harmonizing the accounts of the Resurrection

A rough sequence within the parallel accounts

Matthew 27:62-28:1;

Mark 16:1-3 // Luke 24:1;

Matthew 28:2-4;

John 20:1-10;

Matthew 28:5-8 // Mark 16:4-8 // Luke 24:2-8;

Mark 16:9 // John 20:11-18;
 Matthew 28:9-15;
 Luke 24:13-35;
 Luke 24:36-43 // John 20:19-31.

The presumed sequence of events

Opponents of a Bible with objective authority have long affirmed that there are insuperable discrepancies between/among the four Gospel accounts. My purpose here is to demonstrate that there are no discrepancies.

0. [Saturday—guards seal the stone and set up a watch (Matthew 27:62-66).] This gives a necessary piece of background.

1. Jesus rises from the dead. None of the Evangelists mentions the moment of the resurrection, probably because that information was never revealed. The fact is taken for granted (the “firstborn from the dead”—Col. 1:18, Rev. 1:5; the “firstfruits”—1 Cor. 15:20, 23).

2. Early Sunday morning the women set out for the tomb—Magdalene (John.20:1); Magdalene and Mary (Matthew 28:1); Magdalene, Mary and Salome (Mark 16:1-2); Magdalene, Mary, Joanna and others (Luke 23:55- 24:1, 10). The several accounts say it was very early, as the day began to dawn, while it was still dark, but by the time they got to the tomb the sun had risen. There is no discrepancy: recall that the garden is on the west side of a mountain, so even after the sun had risen the tomb would be in shadow, besides the shade of the trees. It was still darkish when they started out, but away from the mountain it was already day by the time they arrived—the tomb area would still be gloomy.

3. On the way they worry about the stone, “Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?”, because it was very large (Mark 16:3).

4. Before they arrive an angel rolls back the stone, complete with earthquake, etc. (Matthew 28:2-4). The removal of the stone was not to let Jesus out; it was to let witnesses in! If we only had Matthew’s record, we could assume that the women saw the shining angel outside the sepulcher, but a comparison of the other accounts leads to a different understanding. So how do we know those details? Matthew 28:11 says that “some” of the guard reported to the priests and accepted big money to spread a false report, but what happened to the other guards? I have no doubt that some of those guards were soundly converted and gave an eyewitness account to the Christian community.

5. They arrive and see that the stone has been rolled back, but the angel was no longer visible outside (Mark 16:4, Luke 24:2, John 20:1). If the angel had been visible, Magdalene would not have taken off, because she would not have thought that the body had been stolen. The hypothesis that she came once alone, before the others, is highly improbable (see the next point).

6. Magdalene takes off immediately to tell Peter—Peter and John run to the tomb to see (John 20:2-3). Her use of the plural “we”, verse 2, indicates that she was not alone at the tomb.

7. Before Peter and John get there the other women enter the tomb, and see and hear the angels (Luke 24:3-8, Mark 16:5-7, Matthew 28:5-7). I take Matthew and Mark to be parallel, describing the same event: the angel who rolled away the stone is now inside the sepulcher, sitting on the right side; he has turned off his neon and appears to be a young man clothed in white; each account furnishes a few distinct details in the angel’s speech. I here offer a harmonization of the two (Matthew and Mark).

Upon entering the tomb they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. Then the angel spoke up and said to the women: “Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus the Natsarene, who was crucified. 6 He is not here, because He is risen, just like He said! Come, see the place where they laid Him. Now go quickly and tell His disciples, also Peter: ‘He is risen from the dead; and get this, He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you’. There, I have told you!” [It almost sounds like he was glad to get it off his chest. I wonder why.]

However, the women were not sure they were happy with the situation; they were having trouble assimilating the missing body (they were loaded with spices to put on that body—was their effort to be wasted?); they didn’t know who that ‘young man’ was; everything was very strange [don’t forget the ‘dead’ soldiers outside]. I take it that Luke records a second inning: so the angel calls in a colleague and they both turn on their neon—a little shock treatment; then they appeal to Jesus’ own words, which the women remember, and with that they are convinced and go their way.

8. They leave the tomb in fear, saying nothing to the guards or anyone they chance to meet (Mark 16:8, Matthew 28:8a).

9. Probably right after the women leave, and before Peter and John arrive, the guards take off (Matthew 28:11-15).

10. Peter and John come and go [to their own homes] (John 20:4-10; cf. Luke 24:12 that is an historical aside). Verse 8 says that John (the author) “saw and believed”. What did John ‘see’ that made him ‘believe’? He saw the linen strips ‘lying’, that is, in the form of the body, only there was no body inside them! If someone had stolen the body, as Magdalene supposed, they would have taken the wrapped package (much easier to carry) and there would have been no linen strips. If someone had unwrapped the body, for whatever reason, there would have been a sizable mound of linen strips and spices piled up (how much cloth would it take to wrap up a hundred pounds of spices?). No, Jesus simply passed through the cloth, as He would later pass through the wall of the upper room, leaving the package like a mummy case or empty cocoon. When John saw that, he understood that the only possible explanation was resurrection.

11. Magdalene returns to the sepulcher but does not get there until everyone is gone (that is why she thought Jesus was the gardener); Jesus appears to her first (Mark 16:9, John 20:11-17). When the disciples took off running, of course Magdalene followed them back to the tomb. But she was winded, and could not keep up with them (actually, in that culture women probably seldom ran, so she would really be out of breath, but she was not about to be left out of the action, either). She may have arrived as they were leaving; if not, they would pass her on the road. In verse 12, John says that she saw two ‘angels’. How did John know they were angels? He had just been there and knew there were no human beings around (the guards were presumably gone before the two got there). The angels were in white, but probably not shining, or Magdalene would have been shaken out of her despair. She was so locked in to her sorrow that not even seeing the wrappings collapsed without the body sank in.

12. Then Jesus appears to the other women and they go on their way to tell the disciples (Matthew 28:9-10, Luke 24:9-11). The question may reasonably be asked: How could Magdalene have time to go and come and Jesus appear to her first and still have time to appear to the women before they got to the disciples, the

more so since Matthew 28:8 says the women “hurried and ran”? I offer the following considerations in relief of the perceived difficulty: 1) The Jerusalem of that day was small and distances were short (“nearby”, John 19:42)—it was probably less than a mile, or even half a mile, between the tomb and Peter’s house, as well as where the other disciples were staying; 2) the women were probably slow in entering the tomb—the guards making like dead men, dark, spooky (it’s a cemetery), all very strange, Magdalene the impulsive one wasn’t there; they would be leery—Magdalene may have been almost to Peter’s house before they worked up the courage to enter the tomb; 3) Magdalene, Peter and John were excited and had extra adrenalin—it didn’t take that long; 4) The women ran out of the tomb and the garden, but not necessarily all the way to the disciples—once they got away from the garden and on ‘safe’ ground they may well have slowed down, or even stopped, to get a grip on themselves and discuss what had happened (Mary, the mother of James, was no longer young, and none of the women was used to running, not to mention the type of clothing they wore). Putting it all together, I see no reason to doubt that it all happened just like the Text says.

13. Magdalene goes and tells the disciples (Mark 16:10-11, John 20:18).

14. Later in the day Jesus appears to Peter (cf. Luke 24:34). I see no way of determining the correct sequence of items 14 and 15, it could have been the other way around. Also, during resurrection Sunday (we don’t know just when) many resurrected saints “went into the holy city and appeared to many” (Matthew 27:53), which would have been dramatic confirmatory evidence to those who were visited.

15. The Emmaus road episode (Luke 24:13-35, Mark 16:12-13). Some have alleged a discrepancy between the two accounts—their mistake is to tie both accounts to the eleven, which was not the case. There were other people in the upper room, besides the eleven. The eleven (ten) were reclining at a table, the ‘others’ would be nearer the door. The two from Emmaus come bursting in, all excited and probably feeling just a little 5 important; it is the ‘others’, probably to ‘prick their balloon’, who say, “Oh, we already know that; He has appeared to Simon.” (Human nature hasn’t changed, and they didn’t have the Holy Spirit yet.) While the two from Emmaus are talking with the ‘others’, not the eleven, Jesus Himself appears and interacts with the eleven (and they think He’s a ghost!). Mark, writing for a Roman audience, is emphasizing that the disciples were not gullible, did not ‘believe’ because they wanted to—in verse 11 they didn’t believe Magdalene, in verse 13 nor the two, in verse 14 Jesus rebukes their unbelief. There is nothing here to impugn the genuineness of these verses—they were certainly written by Mark at the same time that he wrote the rest. According to Matthew 28:17 many days later some were still doubting. In any group of people there are always differing levels of belief and unbelief. People’s heads work differently, and at different speeds.

16. Jesus appears to the eleven, Thomas being absent (Luke 24:36-48, Mark 16:14-18, John 20:19-23).

17. After Jesus leaves, Thomas comes in and they tell him (John 20:24-25).

Conclusion

Putting it all together, I see no reason to doubt that it all happened just like the Text says. There are no discrepancies, in spite of the variety of details furnished by various eyewitnesses (including converted guards) and recorded by four different Evangelists. It is just what we should expect from an inspired Text—inspired and preserved, to this day.

30) Harmonizing the accounts of the ‘temptation’

The ‘temptation of Jesus’ is mentioned by three of the Gospels. Mark is very brief (1:12-13); he has the Holy Spirit ‘driving’ Jesus into the wilderness, rather than the ‘leading’ of the other two; also, he is the only one who mentions the animals. Matthew and Luke give more detailed accounts, with some discrepancies, which give rise to this note.

Matthew has, “into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil”. Luke has, “into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil”. We have no record of what Satan did during the forty days. That which is recorded happened at the end. Both Matthew and Luke agree that Jesus ate nothing during the 40 days, that at the end He was hungry, and that at that point Satan presented himself. They both record the same three tests, but in a different order, and it is this difference that requires special comment. The descriptions of the tests are not identical, but can easily be harmonized. At the end, Matthew has, “then the devil left Him, and angels came and ministered to Him”. (Mark also mentions the angels.) Luke has: “When the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.” The two statements complement each other.

I will now consider the three tests. Both begin with ‘bread’, but Matthew has “these stones”, while Luke has ‘this stone’. I assume that both are correct. Satan started with ‘these stones’ and then singled out one that looked just like a loaf and said ‘this one’. Both have Jesus responding with Deuteronomy 8:3. (Unfortunately, in Luke 4:4, less than half a percent of the extant Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality, omit “but by every word of God”, to be followed by most modern versions.)

For the second test, Matthew has the temple, while Luke has the high mountain, the third test being the reverse. So who has the correct sequence? Luke introduces both his second and third tests with the conjunction ‘and’, as if they were like separate blocks in a row. Matthew introduces his second test with a temporal adverb of sequence, ‘then’; he introduces the third with another adverb, ‘again’, one of whose uses is sequence. Since Matthew overtly states the sequence, I conclude that his order is the correct one—Luke was not concerned to give the sequence; he handles the ‘temple’ almost like an afterthought (the introductory conjunction could be rendered ‘also’). Matthew’s order is also the logical sequence; there is a progression in the severity or importance of the tests.

The actual description of the temple test given by both is almost identical. Matthew says “holy city” while Luke says “Jerusalem”. Satan cites Psalm 91:11-12, and Jesus responds with Deuteronomy 6:16. As for the high mountain test, Luke has a fuller description than does Matthew, but they are in harmony. In Matthew 4:10 some 12% of the Greek manuscripts omit “behind me”, as in most versions; in Luke 4:8 the whole “Get behind me, Satan!” is omitted by perhaps 3.5% of the Greek manuscripts (of inferior quality), to be followed by most modern versions. (Strange to relate, in Luke 4:5 just three known Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality [against over 1,700, almost all of which are better than the three], omit “up on a high mountain the devil”, to be followed by most modern versions, except that some keep ‘the devil’.)

To conclude, each of the three accounts supplies some information not found in the others, but they harmonize, being complementary. The one apparent discrepancy, the order of tests two and three, has a reasonable solution.

31) Herod and John

To begin, Matthew 14:1-2, Mark 6:14-16 and Luke 9:7-9 are really about Jesus, not John, so I will set them aside. That leaves Matthew 14:3-12 and Mark 6:17-29 for consideration. However, strictly speaking, Matthew 14:6-12 and Mark 6:21-29 are really about Herodias, how she got revenge, so I will start with the remaining verses, Matthew 14:3-5 and Mark 6:17-20.

Matthew 14:—3 For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. 4 For John would say to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her".^a 5 And although he wanted to kill him, he feared the crowd, because they counted him as a prophet.

Mark 6:—17 You see, Herod himself had ordered John arrested, and bound him in prison, on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; because he had married her 18—John had kept saying to Herod, "It isn't lawful for you to have your brother's wife". 19 So Herodias nursed a grudge against him and wanted to kill him;^b but she could not, 20 because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a just and holy man. And consulting him he would do many things; indeed, he would hear him with pleasure.

At first glance there appears to be some discrepancy between the two accounts, but let us slow down and take a careful look.

1) The whole episode revolves around Herodias. Her marriage to Philip presumably had nothing to do with passionate love, as such marriages seldom had. With the passage of time (she had a teenage daughter) she decided that Herod had more to offer than did his brother, and managed to convince Herod to take her on.

2) Enter John the Baptizer: he evidently was on speaking terms with Herod, and had access to him to the extent that he was able to reprimand him repeatedly for what he had done. Now kings generally do not enjoy being reprimanded, and a queen such as Herodias even less. Herod was mad, and Herodias was furious.

3) The evident solution was to get rid of the irritant, so Herod had John arrested, with a view to executing him. But Herod was a puppet king, under the dominion of Rome, and some attention needed to be given to public opinion—it was public opinion that put off the execution: "he feared the crowd, because they counted him as a prophet".

4) Now Herod knew that John was "a just and holy man", and the two had been on talking terms. With the passing of time, Herod calmed down and cooled off. He decided that he did not want to kill John, but because of Herodias he could not release him, either (she kept on insisting that John should be killed). But if you must keep a prophet of God in your prison, you may as well make use of him.

5) Now consider the last half of Mark 6:20—"And consulting him he would do many things; indeed, he would hear him with pleasure." I here follow the best line of transmission, albeit representing only 20% of the Greek manuscripts, that has 'consulting' in the present tense; the rest, followed by all versions, have the verb in

^a The impression one gets is that John took Herod to task several times—a coward he was not.

^b I suppose that Herodias was ambitious and figured that Herod offered more than did Philip, so it was probably she who took the initiative; but she had not counted on John being a persistent and vocal 'conscience'.

the past. Thus the NKJV has: “when he heard him, he did many things”. However, and unfortunately, at this point most ‘modern’ versions garble the account.

The immediately following ‘he would do many things/he did many things’ is attested by over 99% of the Greek manuscripts—a mere handful (0.4%), of objectively inferior quality, have ‘he was greatly disturbed’ or ‘very perplexed’ (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.). But why then did Herod hear John with pleasure, and why was he ‘very sorry’ (verse 26)? Those modern versions don’t make sense; and just why do they insist on garbling the account on such a totally inadequate basis?

But what sorts of things would Herod take to John for his opinion? I suggest that Herod used John as a sounding board for administrative problems, and since he often followed his advice, he had an unusually good administration, there for a while. That is why he was genuinely sorry to lose John.

6) Alas, Herodias knew how to nurse a grudge, and never gave up looking for a way to kill John. The opportune moment came on Herod’s birthday. Herod had doubtless already ‘celebrated’ more than was good for him before the banquet began, and was no longer thinking clearly. We know the rest of the story. One wonders why God would allow such a servant, as was John, to suffer such an ignominious death; but at least it was instantaneous—in terms of suffering, crucifixion or burning at the stake would have been worse. We have no right to understand everything, and therefore no obligation to explain everything. When you get to heaven you can ask God directly, if you still want to know.

32) How did Judas die?

Matthew 27:5-8 X Acts 1:18-19

In the NKJV, according to Matthew, he “went and hanged himself”, while according to Acts, “falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out”. From the context it is clear that this happened at the field that he purchased, posthumously. For a successful hanging, there must be enough altitude so that when the end of the rope is reached the victim is still in the air. But to fall headlong there has to be a cliff, and you would have to dive off. Putting the two accounts together we may understand that there must have been a tree near the edge of the cliff, with a branch reaching out beyond the edge; Judas tied a cord around that branch and his neck and jumped—either the cord or the branch broke, and the impact was sufficient to split him open. Matthew states that it was actually the chief priests who bought the field, using the money that Judas had thrown on the temple floor; so Judas made the purchase posthumously.

33) How long was Jesus’ body in the tomb?

Many books and articles have been written about this question. The principal difficulty derives from Jesus’ own use of several different expressions to describe that time. Referring to the time period between His death and resurrection He Himself said—“the third day”, “after three days” and “three days and three nights”. A careful look at all the relevant passages makes clear that the three phrases are not equal candidates. Consider:

There is only one instance of ‘three days and three nights’, to be found in Matthew 12:40. Jesus cites the experience of Jonah (Jonah 1:17) and says that He

will have a similar experience. That we are in the presence of a Hebrew idiom will become apparent from what follows.

There are just two instances of ‘after three days’, to be found in Mark 8:31 and Matthew 27:63. In Mark Jesus is cited in an indirect quote, as Jesus tells the disciples what is going to happen to Him. In Matthew Jesus is quoted by the Jewish leaders as they ask Pilate to guard the tomb; but notice that in verse 64 they go on to say, “until the third day”, so the two phrases would appear to be synonymous.

As for ‘the third day’, there are eleven direct instances, plus three related ones. Proper hermeneutic procedure requires that we interpret the few in terms of the many, and not the reverse. In Matthew 16:21, 17:23, 20:19; Mark 9:31, 10:34;^a Luke 9:22, 18:33, Jesus is telling the disciples what is going to happen to Him. In Luke 24:7 the angel quotes Jesus to the women at the empty tomb. In Luke 24:46 the resurrected Jesus is speaking with the disciples. In Acts 10:40 Peter is preaching to Cornelius. In 1 Corinthians 15:4 Paul makes a statement. Those are the eleven direct instances. In Luke 24:21 Cleopas says to Jesus, “today is the third day since these things happened”—the ‘these things’ refers to the crucifixion, and the ‘today’ includes the resurrection, since he cites the women. In John 2:19 Jesus says, “destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it”. In Luke 13:32 Jesus sends a message to Herod, “the third day I will be perfected”. Those are the three related instances, for a total of fourteen. Well, the last one is marginal, so make it thirteen.

I suppose that all human cultures have the tendency to think that their way of seeing things is right, and all others wrong. But what to do when conflicts arise? When attempting to understand a given event, it is the culture within which it happened that must be respected. Jews and Brazilians handle time differently than do ‘Westerners’ in general. Here in Brazil, after church, we often say, “I’ll see you in eight days”, which means the next Sunday. The day in which you are is included in the number. We have biblical basis; consider John 20:26. “Well, after eight days His disciples were inside again, and Thomas with them.” ‘Eight days’ from when? “Then at evening on that first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the middle” (John 20:19). The ‘first day of the week’ is Sunday; the use of “that” indicates that it was Resurrection Sunday. With few exceptions, the Church Universal has always understood that Jesus arose on a Sunday, as the Text plainly indicates. In John 20:26 “after eight days” means the next Sunday. To the ‘western’ mind, the use of ‘after’ is misleading; ‘after eight days’ would place one in the ninth day. But we are in the presence of a Hebrew idiom, wherein ‘after eight days’ = ‘the eighth day’. This is plainly indicated in Matthew 27:63-64, where ‘after three days’ = ‘until the third day’. But as already noted, the beginning day is included in the number; so ‘after eight days’ = ‘the eighth day’ = seven consecutive solar days of elapsed time (although the first and last solar day may not be a full 24 hours).

Now consider Luke 23:53-24:1.

“Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock, where no one had ever been laid. 54 It was a Preparation day; the Sabbath was drawing near. 55 The women who had come with Him from Galilee followed along, and they saw the tomb and how His body was placed there. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. But they

^a In Mark 10:34 the eclectic text currently in vogue reads ‘after three days’, following a mere 0.7% of the extant Greek manuscripts, which manuscripts are of objectively inferior quality, demonstrably so.

rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment. 1 Then on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb carrying the spices that they had prepared, along with some others.”

After the women observed the burial, they rested for one day—Sabbath is singular. They took their spices to the tomb on Sunday. It follows that Jesus was buried on Friday. Jesus was in the tomb for part of Friday, all of Saturday, and part of Sunday—He rose ‘the third day’.

Mark 14:1 may also be of interest. “It was two days before the Passover and the Unleavened Bread.” According to a careful analysis of the sequence of events that made up the last week, at this point it was late Tuesday afternoon, probably after 6:00 p.m.—adding two days takes us to 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, but the proceedings in the upper room began after 6:00 p.m. on that Thursday, which to the Jews was already Friday. Therefore Jesus died on a Friday. We take it that “3 days and 3 nights” was an idiomatic expression that could refer to three solar days represented by some part of each, but in sequence—in this case: Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

34) How many people?

Acts 7:14 X Genesis 46:26 X Genesis 46:27

Again, we need only pay close attention to each context, and the precise wording of the text. The three verses give us three different numbers: 75, 66 and 70, respectively. I will begin with the smallest number, which is in Genesis 46:26: “All the persons who went with Jacob to Egypt, who came from his body, besides Jacob’s sons’ wives, were sixty-six persons in all.” The crucial datum is ‘from his body’, so who were they? Reuben + four sons = 5, Simeon + six sons = 7, Levi + three sons = 4, Judah + five sons + 6, Issachar + four sons = 5, Zebulun + three sons = 4, that add up to 31, but we must include Dinah to get the total of 32 from Leah. Gad + seven sons = 8, Asher + six sons + 7, but we must add a daughter (mentioned in the record) to get the total of 16 from Zilpah. Joseph + two sons = 3, Benjamin + ten sons = 11, that add up to 14 from Rachel. Dan + one son = 2, Naphtali + four sons = 5, that add up to 7 from Bilhah. The grand total ‘from his body’ is 69. But of course Joseph and his two sons were already in Egypt, so that leaves 66 who ‘went with Jacob to Egypt’. Genesis 46:27 says, “All the persons of the house of Jacob who went to Egypt were seventy.” This includes Joseph and Jacob himself, so there is no discrepancy. But what about Acts 7:14? “Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people.” The 75 presumably refers to ‘all his relatives’, which excludes Jacob and of course Joseph. I take it that nine wives came to Egypt (the wives are mentioned in Genesis 46:26), the other two having died before the migration. (If we include Jacob, there would be eight wives.)

35) How many animals?

Matthew 21:1-7 X Mark 11:1-10, Luke 19:29-36, John 12:12-15

Mark, Luke and John are agreed in mentioning a single animal, a donkey colt. It was loosed, brought to Jesus, garments placed upon it, and then Jesus rode on it. Matthew insists on telling us that there were really two animals, the colt and its mother. The AV (KJV) has a most unfortunate translation of both Matthew 21:5 and Zechariah 9:9 (that has been corrected in the NKJV, fortunately). In Zechariah

the AV has, “riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.” In Matthew the AV has, “sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.” The obvious difficulty is that the AV makes Jesus ride two animals, when in fact He only rode one. For the correct rendering of both Zechariah and Matthew, at this point, please see the NKJV. That said, however, the fact remains that Matthew clearly has the disciples fetching two animals and placing garments on both.

Why do you suppose the Holy Spirit had Matthew supply the added information? I was not there, of course, but I offer my understanding of the event. Mark and Luke specify that no one had ever sat on the colt; they say that the colt was tied, but Matthew says it was really the mother that was tied. Evidently the colt was so young that it was still staying close to ‘mother’, so if she was tied, he was too, in effect (they were out in the street, and that may have been a new experience for the colt). Jesus was going to subject the colt to a strange and even frightening situation. From the peace and quiet of his little village, he would be surrounded by a shouting crowd. Strange things would be put on his back, and then someone who was probably bigger and heavier than he was would sit on him! I believe that Jesus had the mother brought along as moral support for her son. Clothes were put on her too (and of course she was surrounded by the shouting crowd as well), and seeing that she was calm would encourage the colt. Just by the way, Jesus probably had to lift His feet to keep them from dragging; it must have been a comical sight. It gives me a warm feeling to see that the Lord Jesus was concerned for the well-being of the colt.

36) How Often Did Jesus Say Peter Would Deny Him?

The question can be understood in two different senses, and I wish to explore them both. How often was Peter to deny the Lord, and how often did the Lord warn him? I will consider the second question first. Each Gospel records a warning—the relevant passages are Matthew 26:30-35, Mark 14:26-31, Luke 22:31-34, 39 and John 13:36-38, 18:1. For reasons that will presently become apparent I will start to discuss the passages in reverse order.

How Many Warnings?

First, John 13:36-38:

36 Simon Peter says to Him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but later you will follow me”. 37 Peter says to Him: “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for your sake!” 38 Jesus answered him: “You will lay down your life for my sake? Most assuredly I say to you, no rooster can crow until you have denied me three times!”^a

^a The emphasis here is on the obligatory absence of any cockcrow until Peter has denied [at least] three times. There is no definite article with ‘rooster’, so it is “a rooster”; the negative is double, therefore emphatic, “absolutely not”. If you have lived where there were a number of roosters, you know that one or another can sound off at any time, and some one of them will crow almost on the hour throughout the night, while at dawn they put on a chorus. It was probably somewhere around 9 p.m. when Jesus issued this warning, and Peter’s first denial probably happened at least five hours later. For not a single rooster to crow anywhere within earshot during that time required supernatural intervention—which is why I render “no rooster can crow” (if an angel can close lions’ mouths [Dan. 6:22], closing roosters’ beaks would be a cakewalk).

Notice the distinctive context that leads into our Lord's warning. Notice also the emphatic nature of His declaration—by employing a double negative (in the Greek text) He leaves no question but that three denials will take place before the first rooster crows from that moment on. Notice finally where and when this exchange took place. They were in the upper room where they had gathered to observe the Passover. Evidently this conversation between the Lord and Peter came comparatively early in the proceedings, because it was followed by the contents of chapters 14, 15, 16 and 17 before they left the room and went to the garden on the Mount of Olives (18:1).

Second, Luke 22:31-34:

31 Then the Lord said, "Simon, Simon, indeed Satan has asked for you (pl) that he may sift you as wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you (sg) that your faith should not fail, and when you have returned to me strengthen your brothers." 33 But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death!" 34 So He said, "I tell you, Peter, no rooster can crow this day before you will deny three times that you know me!"

Notice again the distinctive context that leads into our Lord's warning. It is clearly different from that given in John 13. Notice also that there seems to be an increase in the intensity of their exchange. There is a note of reproach in Peter's speech, and the use of Peter's name gives a stern note to the Lord's response. The addition of "today" (compared to John 13) and the shifting of "thrice" to an emphatic position (in the Greek text—again as compared to John) contribute to the feeling of heightened intensity. Also, now Peter will deny that he even knows Him. Note finally where and when this exchange took place. They were still in the upper room, but this conversation evidently came near the end of the proceedings, because only the contents of verses 35-38 intervened before they left the room and went to the Mount of Olives (22:39). Of course, more may have actually happened than is recorded in 22:35-38, but it seems clear that the warning recorded in Luke is not the same as the one recorded in John, and that the one in John happened first.

I find a comparison of the two warnings in Greek to be impressive and convincing:

John 13:38: "Τὴν ψυχὴν σου ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ θησεῖς Ἀμὴν, ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, οὐ μὴ ἀλεκτωρ φωνήσῃ ἕως οὗ ἀπαρνήσῃ με τρίς."

Luke 22:34: "Λέγω σοι, Πέτρε, οὐ μὴ φωνήσῃ σημερον ἀλεκτωρ πρὶν ἢ τρίς ἀπαρνήσῃ μὴ εἶδεναι με."

Really, there is no comparison; they are obviously different (even taking into account that they probably spoke Hebrew, so we are looking at a translation). As in John, here again we have a plain affirmation that three denials [at least] will take place before the first rooster crows.

Third, Matthew 26:30-35:

30 And after hymn-singing they went out to the Mount of Olives. 31 Then Jesus says to them, "All of you will be caused to stumble because of me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'. 32 But after I am raised I will go before you to Galilee." 33 Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if everyone *else* is caused to stumble because of you, **I** will never be caused to stumble!" 34 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly I say to you that

this night, before *any* rooster crows, you will deny me three times!" 35
 Peter says to Him, "Even if I have to die with you, I will **not** deny you!"
 All the *other* disciples said the same.

Notice that this exchange took place after they had left the upper room and were on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. Again the context is distinct from that in Luke or John—here the Lord begins by warning all the disciples. Peter counters by contradicting Him. The Lord's reiterated specific warning to Peter contains no new elements except that now it is "this very night". Peter contradicts again, using a double negative for emphasis—he 'has his back up' and is starting to get impertinent. It seems clear that Matthew records a third warning to Peter, subsequent to those in Luke and John.

Fourth, Mark 14:26-31:

26 And after hymn-singing they went out to the Mount of Olives.
 27 And Jesus says to them, "All of you will be caused to stumble because of me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered'. 28 But after I am raised I will go before you to Galilee." 29 But Peter said to Him, "Even if all are caused to stumble, yet I will not be!" 30 And Jesus says to him, "Assuredly I say to you that you, today, even this night, before a rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times!" 31 But he spoke the more vehemently, "If I have to die with you, I will certainly not deny you!" And they all said the same.

The first four verses are virtually identical with the parallel passage in Matthew, so we evidently have the same time and place in both. But now we come to verse 30, the despair of those who defend scriptural inerrancy and the delight of their opponents. Our Lord's statement here differs in several ways from that in Matthew 26:34 but the main problem is the word "twice". What are we to say: Are Matthew 26:34 and Mark 14:30 contradictory accounts of the same warning?

Before settling for that explanation, the precise turn of phrase in Mark 14:30 invites our attention. I believe it will help to see a word for word rendering of what Jesus said. "Assuredly I say to you that you, today, this very night, before twice a rooster crows, thrice you will deny me." The Lord's declaration here seems quite sharp. There is extraordinary emphasis on the second "you". "Twice" is also heavily emphasized. How are we to account for such severity? Peter's effort in verse 29 scarcely seems to merit such a reaction—the reaction recorded in Matthew 26:34 seems much more appropriate. And what shall we say to Mark 14:31? Peter's words here are virtually identical to those in Matthew 26:35 but they are introduced by "but he spoke the more vehemently". Why the vehement reiteration?

I suggest that the solution is to read the following sequence. Matthew 26:30-35^a then Mark 14:30-31:

Jesus: "All of you will be caused to stumble because of me this night..."

Peter: "Though all are caused to stumble because of you, I will never be caused to stumble."

Jesus: "Assuredly I say to you that this night, before any rooster crows, you will deny me three times."

Peter: "Even if I have to die with you I will certainly not deny you!"

Jesus: “Assuredly I say to you that you, today, this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.”

Peter, more vehemently: “If I have to die with you, I will certainly not deny you!”

In other words, Mark omitted the exchange recorded in Matthew 26:34-35^a while Matthew omitted the exchange recorded in Mark 14:30-31^a. (The editorial comment “and they all said the same” comes at the end of the whole episode.)

On three separate occasions Jesus warned Peter that he would deny Him [at least] three times before a rooster crowed during that night. Peter’s responses became increasingly belligerent until after the third warning he even contradicted the Lord with an emphatic double negative (Mat. 26:35). Finally the Lord lost His patience, as it were, and said in effect, “Listen, not only will you deny me three times before a rooster crows once, you will deny me another three times before a rooster crows twice!” For answer Peter repeats his prior statement even more vehemently.

The reader will perceive that in answering the second question I have anticipated the answer to the first one. The Lord warned Peter four times, each Gospel recording a separate instance, and there would be [at least] six denials, three before the first crowing of a rooster (John, Luke, Matthew) and another three before the second (Mark). It remains to enquire whether the several accounts of Peter’s denials will countenance this proposal. The relevant passages are Matthew 26:57-75, Mark 14:53-72, Luke 22:54-62 and John 18:15-27.

How Many Denials?

A cursory reading of these passages suggests that Peter’s denials were provoked by eight different challenges—the maid at the outside entrance (John), a maid in the courtyard (Matthew, Mark, Luke), the same maid a second time (Mark), a different maid in the gateway (Matthew), two different men (Luke, John), and the bystanders on two occasions (John and Matthew, Mark). Although it may be possible to combine one pair or another, there is no reasonable way to get the number down to three. But what if there were at least six denials?

To really get the complete picture we need to plot the relevant information on a chart. We need to know who issued the challenge, where, when, just how was it done, what was Peter’s reaction, and if a rooster crowed. Because of constraints of space and paper size, I will do a Gospel at a time, beginning with John.^a

John 18:15-27:

	1 st denial	2 nd denial	3 rd denial
Who?	the gatekeeper (f)	servants and operatives	a relative of Malchus
Where?	outside gate	by the fire	by the fire (?)
When?	at the beginning of the proceedings	a little while after the first one	a little while after the second one (?)
How was it done?	she asks: “You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?”	they ask: “You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?”	he asks: “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?”

^a A comparison of the contents of the four Gospels reveals that in the main John supplies information not recorded in the other three; he wrote last, with the purpose of supplementing their accounts. Here again, the three denials he describes are all new information, not to be found in the other three.

What was the reaction?	he says: "I am not!"	he said: "I am not!"	(Peter denied again)
Rooster?	(no)	(no)	immediately a rooster crowed

Luke 22:54-62:

	1 st denial	2 nd denial	3 rd denial
Who?	a servant girl	a man	another man
Where?	by the fire	by the fire (?)	by the fire (?)
When?	fairly early on (?)	a little later	about an hour later
How was it done?	she looked intently and said: "This man was also with him."	he said: "You also are of them."	he confidently affirmed: "Surely this fellow also was with him, for he is a Galilean."
What was the reaction?	he said: "Woman, I do not know him!"	he said: "Man, I am not!"	he said: "Man, I do not know what you are saying!"
Rooster?	(no)	(no)	immediately, while he was yet speaking, a rooster crowed.

Matthew 26:57-75:

	1 st denial	2 nd denial	3 rd denial
Who?	a servant girl	another girl	bystanders
Where?	by the fire	in the gateway	by the fire (?)
When?	fairly early on (?)	a little later	a little later
How was it done?	approached him saying: "You too were with Jesus the Galilean."	says to the others: "This fellow also was with Jesus the Natsorean."	come up to Peter and say: "Really, you too are one of them, because your very accent gives you away!"
What was the reaction?	denied before them all: "I don't know what you are saying."	denied with an oath: "I do not know the man!"	began to curse and to swear: "I do not know the man!"
Rooster?	(no)	(no)	immediately a rooster crowed

Mark 14:53-72:

	1 st denial	2 nd denial	3 rd denial
Who?	a servant girl	the same girl	bystanders
Where?	by the fire	in the fore-court (?)	by the fire (?)
When?	fairly early on (?)	a little later	a little later

How was it done?	looked at him and said: “You also were with Jesus the Nazarene.”	says to the bystanders: “This is one of them.”	say to Peter again: “Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean and your speech shows it!”
What was the reaction?	denied, saying: “I neither know nor understand what you are saying!”	(he denied again)	he began to curse and to swear: “I do not know this mand of who you speak!”
Rooster?	he went out to the fore-court and a rooster crowed	(no)	a rooster crowed a second time

If you compare all the parameters—who, where, when, how, what—there really is no way to come out with only three denials; even to come out with only six requires some gymnastics (something I attempted to do in an early draft). Let us try to arrange the events in chronological sequence and see what happens.

John 18:17 gives us what is clearly the first challenge—as the maid who kept the outside door let Peter in, at John’s request, she asked, “You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?”^a Even though John was evidently standing right there, Peter denied, “I am not”. He then went in to stand near the fire in the courtyard. The other Gospels have Peter sitting, while John has him standing. Evidently there were quite a few people about—they could not all sit close to the fire. Presumably they would take turns standing near the fire to warm up and then move away a bit to sit down. Thus they, including Peter, would be alternately sitting and standing.

All four Gospels have Peter in the courtyard near the fire (Mat. 26:58 and 69, Mark 14:54 and 66, Luke 22:55, and John 18:18 and 25) and three of them (Matthew, Mark, John) give some account of the council’s dealings with Jesus before going on with Peter’s denials.^b We know from Luke 22:61 that Jesus was at a window that looked out on the courtyard, only with His back to it. John is the only one who records that the high priest asked Jesus about His disciples (v. 19)—he is facing Jesus and therefore the open window, and would be speaking loudly enough for everyone in the room to hear clearly, so the people in the courtyard also heard everything he said—then in verse 25 we read, “Therefore they said to him, ‘You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?’” I suggest that verse 25 gives us the second challenge and denial. The guards around the fire, presumably prompted by the high priest’s questioning Jesus about His disciples, put their question to Peter. He answers them as he did the girl at the gate, “I am not”. So far the challengers have only questioned, rather than affirm, but now the tempo quickens.

^a Everyone there, including the girl, knows that John belongs to Jesus, so her question is perfectly natural, without malice—since John is vouching for Peter, she assumes that Peter must also belong to Jesus. John had heard all the warnings, so when Peter denied at the gate, in his presence, John doubtless kept a close eye on him the whole rest of the night. So we have an eyewitness account. Of course Peter himself would also be an eyewitness, but since he was undergoing satanic interference in his mind, his powers of recollection might be impaired.

^b It is after midnight and chilly in the courtyard, hence the fire; but there must have been over fifty people in the room where the questioning was going on, and all windows would be open.

I take it that the first denials recorded in Matthew (26:69-70), Mark (14:66-68) and Luke (22:56-57) form a single episode. Collating them we may understand the following. A certain serving girl of the high priest came by and saw Peter sitting near the fire. She looked closely at him and said to the others, "This man also was with him" (Luke). She then addressed Peter directly, "You also were with Jesus the Nazarene, of Galilee" (Matthew, Mark). But he denied before them all, saying, "Girl, I don't know him; I neither know nor understand what you're talking about!" He then went out to the forecourt, and a rooster crowed (Mark 14:68). Thus, there were [at least] three denials before the first cockcrow.

I say 'at least' because the third denial in John probably belongs here as well. In 18:26 the verb "to say" is in the present tense, which seems to suggest a brief interval rather than nearly an hour (Luke 22:59); also the challenge is still framed as a question, "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?", rather than a direct accusation, which would fit better toward the beginning than at the end. I see no problem with suggesting that all three of the denials in John were part of the first set and thus he records the first rooster crow. In that event I would understand that there were actually four denials before the first crowing, the three in John plus the first one in the others. Because the rooster crowed "immediately" I imagine that the order would be as follows: the first two in John, in that order, then the first one in the others, and then, as Peter was moving toward the fore-court, the relative of Peter's victim comes alongside and puts his question, so that Peter is at the fore-court when the first rooster crows (Mark 14:68). Actually, I am inclined to suspect that indeed there were four denials before the first cockcrow, which is recorded by both Mark and John (recall that Jesus neither said nor implied that there would be 'only' three).^a

Now for the next round. In Mark (14:69) the same girl sees Peter again and starts telling the bystanders, "This fellow is one of them". In Matthew (26:71) a different girl sees him and tells the bystanders, "This fellow was with Jesus the Natsorean". In Luke (22:58) a man saw him and said, "You also are one of them". In order to come out with only three denials in the second set, two of these would have to be combined, but as already stated, I am not aware of anything in the Text that rules out the possibility that there could be more than three. It seems to me that there is a progression in Peter's desperation which culminates in his cursing and swearing. On that basis I would consider the instances in Mark and Luke as forming a single episode (if I had to)—the girl speaks, Peter denies, a man backs the girl up and Peter answers, "Man, I am not!" Then the instance in Matthew would be the sixth denial—notice that now Peter adds an oath! Because of the oath I consider that this denial comes after the other two just mentioned; also, Peter has moved out to the gateway. Actually, I am inclined to suspect that there were also four denials before the second cockcrow, so I will start again on that basis.

The girl that provoked the third denial is not about to let Peter get away with that denial. Whether she followed him out to the forecourt, or he moved back toward the fire, I imagine that Mark 14:69 records the fifth denial. If so, Luke 22:58 records the sixth denial, perhaps near the fire. Peter is definitely uncomfortable; he is getting altogether too much unwelcome attention. He moves out to the gateway (perhaps thinking of abandoning the premises)^b where he is challenged by

^a The satanic interference in Peter's mind was so effective that not even the rooster's crowing woke him up.

^b So why didn't Peter just bolt out the gate at that point? I would say that there was supernatural intervention—he simply was not allowed to leave.

a different girl (Matthew 26:71); Peter denies with an oath (number seven). Luke (22:59) puts ‘about an hour’ between denials six and eight, so perhaps Peter was left alone for a bit. However, the ‘trial’ is over but the bosses are waiting for dawn so they can take Jesus to Pilate. Since the bosses are not going home, the guards and employees cannot either—they are obliged to wait out in the cold, bored stiff—so Peter is now the only show in town.

For the eighth denial three Gospels offer a candidate (Mat. 26:73-74, Mark 14:70-72, Luke 22:59-60). The accounts in Matthew and Mark are very similar and evidently parallel. Since Matthew has the rooster crowing “immediately” and Mark “the second time” this has to be last denial—since by now Peter is cursing and swearing it is fitting that it should be. By that time most of the people on the premises would be aware of Peter and his denials. After listening for a while they closed in, citing his accent. The account in Luke has just one man speaking, but his words are in the same vein. This also has to be the last denial because we are told that the rooster crowed while Peter was still speaking. Evidently a number of people were speaking at once (but not in unison), or in rapid succession, and different writers preserve some of the variety of statement. It would appear that they were ganging up on Peter, because he is driven to curse and to swear. And so we have a second set of four denials, before the second cockcrow. Even then it took a direct look from the Lord (Luke 22:61) to break Satan’s spell and bring Peter to a realization of what he had done.

But the question may well be asked, why did each Gospel writer report and speak of only three denials (albeit giving different selections) if there were really six or eight?^a I suggest that we are looking at a prime example of the grace and sensitivity of God. It would be quite humiliating enough to have denied the Lord three/four times, but to go on to do so another three/four times, even after hearing a rooster crow, would be almost too much to bear. Rather than put the full extent of Peter’s ignominy on display the Holy Spirit had each writer give only a partial account, enough for the purposes of the record but without flaying Peter unnecessarily. I find it interesting to note that it is Mark who furnishes the necessary clue that there was to be a second set of denials. The opinion is widely held that Peter influenced the composition of this Gospel—this is overtly stated in the introduction to the Gospel found in many manuscripts—and if so he may have insisted on including the hint as to the extent of his humiliation, whereas the others delicately avoided it.

^a Some 50% of the Greek manuscripts that contain the Gospels have colophons; these colophons state that Matthew was ‘published’ 8 years after Christ’s ascension, Mark 10 years after, Luke 15 years after and John 32 years after Christ’s ascension. (So the four Gospels are arranged in chronological order, not only in our Bibles but in the vast majority of the Greek manuscripts.) “To the Jew first,....”—since Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience, God’s priorities dictated that Matthew’s should be the first inspired account of our Savior’s life on earth to circulate. Then Mark, with Matthew’s Gospel open in front of him, and Peter at his elbow, wrote for the Roman mind (since Romans would care nothing for Hebrew Scriptures, Mark removed virtually all reference to fulfilled prophecy). Then Luke, with both Mark and Matthew to hand, wrote the third, for the Greek mind. Then John, with the first three open, wrote to fill in the gaps, preserving important information not provided by the others, for all minds. Now let’s consider Peter’s denials within that framework. Matthew wrote first, with one cockcrow. Mark says there were really two cockcrows and changes the second denial (1 and 3 are the same in Mark and Matthew). Luke speaks of just one cockcrow, changes the second denial yet again and provides added information (specific) about the third. So just with these three accounts we are up to five denials. John speaks of just one cockcrow but records three new denials, not mentioned by the other three. If these are inspired accounts, then God did it on purpose, and it is up to us to try to figure out why (see my concluding paragraph).

The Text-critical Problem

Although there are around a hundred textual differences reflected in the printed editions of the Greek Text (in the passages considered), I will confine my remarks here to the set that is especially bothersome in terms of the subject matter of this paper.

There are four places in Mark's account that relate to the two cockcrows: "twice" in 14:30, "and a rooster crowed" in 14:68, "the second time" and "twice" in 14:72. Instances 1, 3 and 4 go together and appear to contradict the account in Matthew, Luke and John. Instance 2 is apparently even worse because according to Mark's account Peter had only denied once when the rooster 'jumped the gun' and crowed before he was supposed to (Jesus had said there would certainly be three denials, as recorded in the other three Gospels). Accordingly, ever since the second century there have been those who tried to 'help' Mark out of his difficulties, tampering with the text.

According to the present state of our knowledge it appears that seven Greek MSS omit "twice" in 14:30 (but they do so in two different ways), nine MSS omit "and a rooster crowed" in 14:68 (but in two ways), five omit "the second time" in 14:72^a, and seven omit "twice" in 14:72^b (two others omit the whole clause). The roster of MSS shifts in each case, as does the versional evidence that sides with the omissions. Only three witnesses are thoroughgoing and omit all four: Codex Aleph, cursive 579 and the Old Latin "c" (it^c). This is a curious state of affairs. If the purpose of the omissions was to make Mark conform to the other Gospels, only Aleph, 579 and it^c have succeeded. Of the seventeen MSS involved, twelve omit only one of the four; one MS omits two of them; and two MSS omit three (there is some doubt here). Unless someone is prepared to show why Aleph and 579 are to be preferred above every other MS (some 1700 for Mark), and it^c above all the rest of the versional evidence, Latin and otherwise, there is really no reason to take the omissions seriously. However, the eclectic school does take them seriously, even without the requisite demonstration.

It appears that the 'harder reading' canon has come to the aid of the vast majority of the MSS, at least as far as the editors of the 'critical' or eclectic texts presently in vogue are concerned. Instances 1, 3, and 4 are retained in all Nestle and UBS editions (although UBS ascribes "a considerable degree of doubt" to 1 and 3, and "some degree of doubt" to 4—the change in grade here is strange). However, when it comes to instance 2 ("and a rooster crowed") we get some variety: Nestle editions 1 to 25 omit the words; Nestle²⁶ and all three UBS editions retain them, but in single brackets (the UBS editors ascribe "a very high degree of doubt" to these words, along with the brackets which themselves signify "dubious textual validity"). Presumably the crucial datum here is that Codex B joins the evidence for omission with instance 2 (but not the others). From W-H through N²⁵ that was enough to banish the words from the Text. One supposes that it was the "harder reading" canon that restored them to UBS and N²⁶, if only in brackets. It seems to me that this case affords a clear example of the superficiality that characterizes the work of the eclectic school—to challenge the authenticity of a reading supported by over 99% of the MSS is unreasonable at any time, but to do so in the face of a perfectly obvious motivation for the omission is irresponsible.

The English versions that I have consulted all retain instances 1, 3 and 4, but deal variously with instance 2. AV, LB, NKJV, Phillips and TEV all retain "and a rooster crowed", but LB favors us with a footnote: "This statement is found in only some of the MSS". What might the purpose of such a footnote be? From the use of

the word “only” it would appear that the purpose is to raise a doubt in the reader’s mind about the reliability of the Text. Why would they want to do that? The use of the word “some” also invites comment: it is their way of referring to some 1700 MSS, against nine! Will the reader not be deceived?

Jerusalem, NASB, NEB, NIV and RSV all omit the clause, but only Jerusalem does so without comment. The footnote in NEB reads, “Some witnesses insert ‘and a cock crew’.” As in LB, by “some” they mean some 1700 MSS, not to mention massive versional support and almost unanimous lectionary support. Will the reader not be deceived? The footnote in RSV reads, “Other ancient authorities add ‘and the cock crowed’.” The footnote in NIV reads, “Some early MSS add ‘and the rooster crowd’.” The footnote in NASB reads, “Later mss. add: ‘and a cock crowed’.” In order to evaluate such footnotes we would need to know the precise definitions for “ancient”, “early” and “later”. However, I submit that the uninitiated reader of such footnotes will certainly be misled as to the massive evidence against omission.

The case of the NIV invites special comment. It is the only version that offers a footnote at all four instances. At 14:30 we read, “Some early MSS omit ‘twice’.” At 14:68 we read, “Some early MSS add ‘and the rooster crowed’.” At 14:72^a we read, “Some early MSS omit ‘the second time’.” At 14:72^b we read, “Some early MSS omit ‘twice’.” (The meaning of “some” in the second instance is quite different from that in the other three.) What possible reason could the editors have had for including these footnotes? The immediate effect is to call in question the reliability of the Text at those points. Since the NIV editors held to a high view of Scripture, why would they want to do that? I suppose that it was precisely their concern for the inerrancy of the Text that was at work here. It appears that they did not see any other solution to the seeming discrepancy between Mark and the other Gospels than to imply that Aleph and Old Latin “c” might be right after all. Alas!

The NIV editors are barking up the wrong tree. The worst thing to be done here would be to follow Aleph in deleting all four instances. As already pointed out, the four Gospels record eight different challenges resulting in denials, but no two Gospels have the same selection. So to follow Aleph would force us to try to accommodate eight denials before the first rooster crow, which seems to me to be hopeless. The best thing to be done here is to follow the true Text, which God has graciously caused to be preserved, in this case, in over 99% of the evidence. Peter denied three/four times before the first rooster crow and another set of three/four before the second. The Lord had warned him: “Simon, Simon, indeed Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31). Peter should have paid attention.

Implications

One question that arises is this: What about the internal integrity of each account? For instance, in John’s account, even if we were to claim that two of the denials occurred before the first rooster crow, while the third denial came after the first and before the second, would this claim do violence to the integrity of John’s Gospel? Why would it? Let us review the record. In John 13:38 Jesus said to Peter, “Most assuredly I say to you, a rooster shall not crow till you have denied me three times!” The Lord did not say “only” three times—the emphasis is on the obligatory absence of any rooster crow until Peter has denied three times, at least three times (there is nothing in the Lord’s turn of phrase to preclude the possibility that there could be more than three). In the Greek text there is no definite article with “rooster” and there is an emphatic double negative with the verb “to crow”—“a

rooster shall not crow!” (These observations also apply in Luke 22:34; in fact, in all four Gospels, in both the predictions and the fulfilments, it is always “a” rooster.)

Turning to John’s account of the denials themselves, the first one, at the outside door (18:17), poses no difficulty. The second denial (18:25) likewise poses no difficulty—these two occurred before any rooster crow. But what if the third denial (in John’s account, 18:26-27) came after the first crowing?^a I see no problem, in principle. The Lord made a statement of fact, correctly recorded by John—there had to be three denials before the first rooster crow. This was precisely fulfilled, the others supplying the third denial. Nothing in John’s account precludes the possibility that there should be subsequent crowings. (Anyone who has lived near roosters knows that they start crowing off and on anytime after midnight and at daybreak put on a concert—it seems obvious to me that the first two crowings were overtly controlled by God so as to match Christ’s predictions.) In 18:27, after the third denial recorded by John, we read, “and immediately a rooster crowed”. John does not say that it was the first crowing. Someone without access to the other Gospels would naturally assume that John records the first rooster crow, and that the three denials he gives are the whole story—but nothing in John’s statement demands that interpretation; it simply arises from incomplete information. The other three present several added denials that are clearly distinct. The several Evangelists provide distinct sets of details, much like the pieces of a puzzle, that must be fitted together to get the whole picture. The several accounts are complementary, not contradictory.

But how about the internal integrity of Mark’s account? He is the only one who mentions the second rooster crow, as such, and in fact his account is tied to it. Jesus said, “before a rooster crows twice you will deny me three times,” and Mark records three denials before the second rooster crow. Again, Jesus did not say “only” three times, the emphasis is on “you” and “twice”. The other Gospels are needed to get the full picture, but Mark’s account is entirely self-consistent.

And how about Luke? In the warning the emphasis is on the obligatory absence of a rooster crow until Peter has denied three times—at least three times (Jesus did not say “only” three times). After describing three of the denials Luke writes, “and immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed”. “A” rooster—he does not say it was the first. Then Luke has Peter remembering that Jesus said, “Before a rooster crows you will deny me three times”. Presumably Peter remembered every detail of all the warnings, but Luke (and each of the other Evangelists) gives only a partial description—in fact, Luke has him recalling the warning recorded by Matthew, not the one he himself gave. A reader having only Luke’s account may assume that he told the whole story, but it is an unwarranted assumption. Luke’s account is internally consistent yet the precise turn of phrase is such that it does not preclude my proposal.

So what about Matthew? Virtually everything said about Luke above can be repeated here. He has Peter remembering the warning he himself recorded. Again it is “a” rooster. Matthew’s account is internally consistent yet the turn of phrase will accommodate my proposal without being violated. All of which brings us back to the question: Why does each Gospel speak of three denials, rather than six, eight or whatever? I don’t know; we aren’t told. My best guess is that God chose to draw a veil over the full extent of Peter’s ignominy (and perhaps to test our disposition

^a As the reader knows, I believe the third denial in John comes before the first cockcrow, but I am covering this possibility for the sake of those who may prefer to have it in the second set.

when faced with the unexplained). But it remains a plain fact that each Gospel offers a different assortment of challenges and denials, giving a total of at least eight denials.

Another question that I have heard concerns the validity of attempting an exercise such as this at all. I believe that God deliberately brings difficulties into our lives (Job in the ash heap, Abraham on Moriah, Moses herding sheep, Joseph in prison, Daniel with the lions, and on, and on), and puts puzzles in the world, to test our disposition and fiber, and to cause us to grow. "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). [Even if you are not a king, you get the point.] The case of John the baptizer in prison comes closer to home. He is frustrated, maybe disillusioned; he did his job but his expectations are not being realized. So he sends two disciples to ask Jesus for an explanation. In effect Jesus answers, "Check the evidence; do your homework", and closes with, "And blessed is he who is not offended because of me" (Matthew 11:6). When faced with the difficult or unexplained we must be careful not to rebel. It is much better to obey the command recorded in 1 Peter 3:15. "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you..." Since opponents of a Text with objective authority have used the accounts of Peter's denials as an argument against any idea of inerrancy, I consider that a defense of that inerrancy is in order.

37) How to save your life

When someone asks me how I view my relationship with Jesus Christ, and if there is time to explain, I say that I am His slave. I am in good company since Paul (Romans 1:1), James (James 1:1), Peter (2 Peter 1:1) and Jude (Jude 1) said the same thing. It is a slavery that you choose because of love (see Exodus 21:1-6), love of Jesus, as a free and spontaneous act of the will. Presumably some will not like the idea of being a slave, but do not forget one little detail: everyone is a slave! It is an inherent aspect of the human condition. We are born as slaves, we live as slaves, we die as slaves. In John 8:34 the Lord Jesus declared: "Most assuredly I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." Apart from God the human being has no option; he is born a sinner and remains a slave of sin until he dies. "Slave of sin" is another way of saying 'slave of self'—this is what destroys us; we are self-centered (it leads us to rebel against God)—and to be a slave of 'self' is to be a slave of Satan, because the unaided, self-centered person cannot withstand him. But Jesus offers a choice. Hallelujah! The choice is not to stop being a slave, oh no! The choice is to change masters.

I became a slave of Christ on the 13th of April, 1956, when I was almost twenty-two years old. I have been a 'believer' virtually from birth—I cannot remember a time when I did not believe in the Lord Jesus. I was a believer, but I was not a disciple; I had not yet surrendered my will. Before 4/13/56 I was still ruled by my own ideas and ambitions, my own wishes and desires. I was still trying to choose my own way, to guide my own steps. I had a bad time of it! It seemed like I was always 'falling on my face'. Of course. Wherever would a twenty-year-old gain the wisdom, the knowledge, the capacity to run his own life? When and from whom could he have learned it? (Or a forty-year-old, or a sixty-year-old—do you suppose the situation improves sufficiently?) The Bible states plainly that the human being is not competent to direct his own steps (here please read Jeremiah 10:23, Proverbs 28:26, Jeremiah 17:9 and Proverbs 20:24). Before I became a slave of Jesus I was under the control of a master that lacked understanding, lacked power and lacked

competence—I was really in a bad way. Now I have a Master who has all knowledge, has all power, and loves me so much He died for me. What could be better than that?

Let us see how it works. Consider the situation of a slave in Jesus' time. Did he have any rights? No. Why did a slave exist? To serve, his owner. A slave owned nothing, not even himself. It follows that the owner must meet the slave's physical needs—the slave has nothing. For over fifty years I have lived on the basis of Luke 12:22-34. For over fifty years I did not know from month to month just how much God would give me; rarely was it the same two months in a row. Yet neither I nor my wife and children ever went hungry. I have seen a time when there were at least four knots in my shoelaces, but I have never been without shoes. In short, we have never lacked.

If the owner gives an order that involves expense (e.g. to build a house), then he must furnish the materials, etc. In other words, what the owner orders he himself has to pay for. When Jesus orders something He pays for it. In my case He ordered two master's degrees and a doctorate. They cost plenty—Jesus paid everything; I have nothing. The distance I have traveled by air would girdle the globe more than once—Jesus paid it all; I have nothing. **What Jesus orders He pays for.**

In fact, I have just one major concern in life: to understand just what my Owner wants me to do. Once I am sure, I move forward, without looking back. It is a sure thing. Can I imagine that my Master will go back on His word? Can I doubt His ability or willingness to supply my needs (Psalm 24:1)? Are there any other relevant doubts? I must confess that I find it hard to understand why so many believers refuse to be slaves (or true disciples) of Jesus, why they won't turn their lives over to Him. Can it be that they are asking the wrong question? I suppose many ask themselves, "What is it going to cost me to be a slave/disciple of Christ?" That is not the right question.

The correct question to ask is, "What will it cost me if I am **not** His slave/disciple?" Instead of thinking about what Jesus may demand, about giving up our ambitions and desires, about maybe being sent to the jungle to work with 'Indians', we should really think about the consequences of refusing to surrender our lives to Jesus. The price you pay for not living for Christ's kingdom is to lose your life. That's all it costs, just your life! Consider the words of the Lord Jesus recorded in Luke 9:24-25. Let us begin with verse 23. "If anyone desires to come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross each day and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it. For what will it profit a man to gain the whole world but waste or forfeit himself?" What does the Lord mean when He speaks of losing one's "life"? One does not lose one's soul for love of Christ. Nor is the reference to being killed. Rather, Jesus has in mind the life we live, the accumulated results of our living. All that I have done up to this moment plus all that I will yet do until overtaken by death or the rapture of the Church, whichever happens first—that is the "life" that is at risk (in my own case).

Let us look at our Lord's words a little more closely. There seems to be a contradiction here—if you lose, you save; if you want to save, you lose. How can it work? The following context helps us out. In verse 26 Jesus explains verses 24-25 in terms of His second coming. The parallel passage, Matthew 16:27, is clearer. "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he will repay each according to his deeds." Christ was thinking of the day of reckoning. In other words, "we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ"

(Romans 14:10) and "each of us will give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive his due according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). I understand that 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 is referring to the same occasion, the day of reckoning. After declaring that Jesus Christ is the only foundation, Paul speaks of different materials that one might use in building on it: "gold, silver, precious stones" or "wood, hay, straw". (Although the primary interpretation of this passage presumably has to do with the performance of teachers and leaders in the church, I believe it clearly applies to the daily life of each believer as well.) The point is, our deeds will be tested by fire. If fire has any effect upon gold or silver it is only to purify them, but its effect on hay and straw is devastating! Okay, so what?

Let us go back to the beginning. God created the human being for His glory; to reflect it and contribute to it. I suppose we may understand Psalm 19:1 and Isaiah 43:7 in this way, at least by extension. But Adam lost this capacity when he rebelled against God. For this reason the sentence that weighs against our race is that we "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But the Son came into the world to restore our lost potential. Ephesians 1:12 and 14 tell us that the object of the plan of salvation is "the praise of His glory" (see also 2 Corinthians 1:20). And 1 Corinthians 10:31 puts it into a **command**: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Now then, the point of all this is not to 'ruin' our lives, to take all the 'fun' out of them (as many seem to think). God is not being arrogant, unreasonable, too demanding. Quite the contrary—He is just trying to save us from throwing away our lives. Surely, because the glory of God is eternal (Psalm 104:31), and when I do something for His glory that something is transformed and acquires eternal value—it becomes "gold, silver, precious stones". Works done for the glory of God will go through the fire without harm. On the other hand, what is done with a view to our own ambitions and ideas is "straw". We all know what fire does to straw!

So there it is. To be a slave of Christ means to live with reference to the Kingdom; it means to do everything for the glory of God. In this way the slave "saves" his life because he will be building it with "gold and silver", which will pass through the fire at the judgment seat of Christ without loss. In contrast, the believer who refuses to be a slave of Jesus builds his life with "hay and straw", which will be consumed by the fire—and so he "loses" his life; he lived in vain; the potential that his life represented was wasted, thrown away. What a tragedy!

(I suppose there might be someone who will say: "Okay, okay! I get the point. I'm throwing away my life. So what? What business is it of yours? If I want to lose my life that's my problem!" Well, sure, that is right, it is your problem. But I wish you would consider one detail: the problem is not exclusively yours; it is not just **yours**! It also concerns the individuals who should have been reached through your life but were not. And it concerns Christ Himself who was cheated out of His right in your life.)

38) Hunger and thirst for righteousness

Matthew 5:6

The semantic area of the word 'righteousness' occurs hundreds of times in the Bible, in both Testaments. To begin with, we must distinguish 'righteousness' from 'holiness'. Holiness has to do with the absence of sin, and only the Triune God is

perfectly holy in His essence. Righteousness (or 'wholeness of character') has to do with appropriate behavior within a certain standard of conduct. Now then, since a standard of conduct devised by men is often different from the standard of conduct promulgated by the Sovereign Creator, I have used 'moral rectitude'. Certainly Jesus was thinking of God's standard; He was referring to acting with moral rightness before God.

But why did Jesus cite both hunger and thirst? Whoever is hungry will look for something to eat; those who are thirsty will look for something to drink. And what happens if someone is both hungry and thirsty? It seems to me that the person's situation becomes urgent; he will search with determination until he finds something. What is at stake is the relationship between the person and God. And since the Father seeks those who worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23), He will go to meet such people.

Consider 2 Chronicles 16:9—"The eyes of Jehovah run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him". God is looking for whom He can bless. Consider also Jeremiah 29:13—"You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart". It is a promise; but it depends on us. It is the consequence of the 'great' commandment: "You must love Jehovah your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind" (Matthew 22:37, Deuteronomy 6:5).

Then, with all certainty, God will satisfy the person who dedicates himself to moral righteousness with determination.

39) Jeremiah?

Matthew 27:9-10

In the NKJV, Matthew 27:9-10 reads like this: "Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, *And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter's field, as the LORD directed me.*" The difficulty comes when we try to find this material in our canonical Jeremiah. Cross-references send us to Jeremiah 32:6-9, or 18:1-4, or 19:1-3, but upon inspection they must do not match. In Zechariah 11:12-13 we find a general approximation, but it is not precise—and of course Zechariah is not Jeremiah. Evidently there are Hebrew manuscripts that begin the scroll containing the prophets (major and minor) with Jeremiah, and it has been argued that Matthew used 'Jeremiah' to refer to the contents of the entire scroll. I suppose that could be a possibility, but I prefer to appeal to Daniel 9:2. "In the first year of his reign [Darius] I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years *specified* by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet..." Note that 'books' is plural. Why should any of us assume that men like Jeremiah, or Isaiah, wrote only what is in our canon? (I myself have written a great deal that has never been published.) Daniel clearly wrote 'books', presumably referring to Jeremiah. I conclude that such extra-canonical books were still known in Matthew's day, and that he refers to one of them. I am aware that the distinction cannot be insisted upon, but Matthew did use 'spoken' rather than 'written'.

40) 'Jesus', or 'Joshua'?***Hebrews 4:8***

Beyond question, the Greek Text has 'Jesus', as in the AV, but most modern versions put 'Joshua'. I suppose that 'Jesus' was judged to be an anachronism, and so 'Joshua' was elected to relieve the situation. To be sure, the Septuagint we know uniformly spells 'Joshua' as *Ἰησοῦς* (Jesus) [as a linguist I wonder why the translators transliterated '*Jehoshua*' as '*Iesus*'], and probably in consequence, in Acts 7:45 Luke refers to Joshua as '*Iesus*' [it was not his purpose to correct the LXX]. However, looking carefully at the context in Psalm 95:7-11, Joshua just does not fit. Consider: it is presumably Jehovah the Son who is speaking ("Jehovah our Maker", verse 6), and since the reference is to those who fell in the wilderness during the forty years, Joshua cannot be in view. Not only that, I invite attention to Joshua 21:43-45 and 23:1, where the Text says that Joshua did in fact give them rest. So whom are you going to believe? Of course the Text is referring to physical rest, not spiritual, since neither Joshua nor anyone else could be responsible for a people's spiritual rest. Ezekiel chapter 18 is very clear to the effect that each individual is responsible for his own eternal destiny. God has no grandchildren, only sons and daughters. In Mathew 23:8-10 Sovereign Jesus forbids any attempt to dominate someone else's faith or conscience. This is consistent with His statement in John 4:23-24. The worship that the Father wants cannot be forced, imposed, controlled or faked.

In relief of the notion of 'anachronism' I offer the following: 1) in John 12:41 John affirms that Isaiah saw Jesus (it was Jehovah the Son on the throne); 2) in 1 Corinthians 10:4 Paul affirms that the Rock that provided water was Christ; 3) in Hebrews 11:26 the same author [as I believe] has Moses choosing "the reproach of Christ"; 4) in 1 Peter 1:19-20 Peter affirms that the shed blood of God's Lamb, Jesus, was foreknown before Creation—but blood requires a body, and the Lamb's body was that of Jesus; so Jesus, as Jesus, was known before Creation. Returning to Hebrews 4:8, it was precisely Jesus, Jehovah the Son, who did not allow that generation to enter the 'rest'.

41) John is not Elijah

'Substitutionism' predominates in Christian churches around the world, the idea that the Church has completely replaced Israel in all of God's future plans. It is theological anti-Semitism. But to maintain that idea, its advocates are obliged to disregard Romans chapters 9, 10, and 11, several other NT texts, and much of the OT prophecies. Disregarding such a large portion of the Sacred Text can have somewhat unpleasant consequences, since the Author of the Text will not take kindly to such an attitude. Afterwards, it should come as no surprise to anyone to find that those who approach the Text with this preconceived idea tend to do nasty things to any passage that is inconvenient for them – for example, Matthew 17:10-13.

So His disciples questioned Him saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 11 In answer Jesus said to them: "Elijah is indeed coming first, and he will restore all things. 12 But I say to you that 'Elijah' has come already, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. Thus also the Son of the Man is about to suffer at

their hands.” 13 Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptizer.^a

It is common to hear such people discourse on verses 12 and 13, severely disregarding verse 11. But since any doctrine should take into account all relevant texts, we can start with the source of the discussion, Malachi 4:5-6.

Behold, I will send you the prophet Elijah, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Jehovah. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; lest I come and strike the earth with total destruction.^b

In Matthew 16:28 Jesus spoke of seeing "the Son of the Man coming in His kingdom", and in the understanding of the three disciples, the Kingdom of the Messiah was linked to 'the day of Jehovah'. They understood that they had just seen a microcosm of the Kingdom, and they had seen Elijah, but they were descending the mountain back into a reality that hardly resembled the Kingdom. Hence the question, I suppose. But let us get back to the relevant texts.

The second is found in Luke 1:17—the angel Gabriel is announcing to Zechariah truths about the son he is going to have, John the Baptizer. This son would go before the Lord his God "in the spirit and power of Elijah"; and refers to Malachi 4:5-6. Faced with the old man's doubt, Gabriel declares that he was sent by God to deliver the message. Now then, would anyone have the courage to say that both the angel and God himself had the intention of deceiving the old man? If John would be Elijah himself, how could the angel say that John would act in Elijah's spirit and power, instead of being Elijah?

Now let us go to John 1:21—when priests and Levites from Jerusalem asked John if he was Elijah, he replied, "I am not". Come now, would anyone have the courage to say that John lied? If he did not lie, then he was not Elijah. Could John be mistaken about his own person and his own office? Hardly: his father had been very clear, and after a long time in the wilderness with God, he began his public ministry. Luke 3:2 clarifies that "the word of God came upon John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness" (the Text says "upon John", not 'to John'; he was compelled by the Word). In John 1:23 the Baptizer quotes Isaiah 40:3 as referring to himself. John neither lied nor made a mistake—he was not Elijah.

But what about Matthew 11:14—"if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come"? Jesus was praising John the Baptizer with some sayings rather difficult to understand; for example in verse 11: "among those born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptizer; but he who is least in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he".^c Verse 12 has also given commentators trouble.

^a At this point John is already dead, but in verse 11 the Lord declares that Elijah is still going to come—John performed the function for Christ's first advent that Elijah (literally) will perform for the second advent.

^b The Hebrew word here means 'total destruction', not 'curse', as in many versions. And when will there be total destruction of the planet? It will be at the end of the Millennial Messianic Kingdom. On the other hand, destruction during the 'great tribulation' will come close; it will be terribly terrible!

^c Evidently, as forerunner of the Kingdom John was not part of it—the Kingdom was rejected at that time; both forerunner and King were killed—those who participate in the actual future Kingdom will be more privileged. "Born of women" excludes Adam. Men like Noah, Abraham, Moses, Daniel would be of equal standing, just not "greater". But those who live during the Messianic Kingdom (Millennium)

In verse 14, when Jesus says, "if you are willing to receive it", it is because the matter is not transparent. Although John was still alive, he was in prison, from whence he would only emerge dead. How then could Jesus say that Elijah still had to come, if it was in fact Elijah who was in prison and would only come out dead? Now we go to Matthew 17:10-13 and Mark 9:11-13, which are parallel; only now John was in fact dead.

In verse 11 (Matthew 17) Jesus declares, "Elijah is indeed coming first, and he will restore all things." Since John was already dead, and Jesus puts the coming of Elijah in the future, then John was not Elijah. Further, John did not "restore all things"; in fact, he restored relatively little. In short: John filled the office, herald, for the first advent of Christ that Elijah himself (literally) will fill for the second advent. They are different people, with different moments.

42) John's Gospel: Jewish time or Roman time?

Recently a friend and correspondent wrote me that 90% of commentaries and 95% of Bible versions affirm that John's Gospel uses Jewish time, not Roman. Well now, as far back as I can remember, I have always supposed that John used Roman time. Although in spiritual matters the majority is generally wrong, 9 to 1 borders on the lopsided, so I decided to go back and look again. As best I can tell, there are four places where John mentions a specific hour: 1:39, 4:6, 4:52 and 19:14. I will consider them in that order.

1:35 Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples. 36 And seeing Jesus walking by, he says, "Look, the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38 So turning and observing them following^a Jesus says to them, "What do you want?" So they said to Him, "Rabbi" (which translated means "Teacher"), "where are You staying?" 39 He says to them, "Come and see". So they went and saw where He was staying, and stayed with Him that day—**it was about the tenth hour.**

Note the "and stayed with Him that day". If John were using Jewish time, this would be 4:00 p.m. But in Jewish time there would only be two more hours in the day, since the new day would begin at 6:00 p.m. It would border on the dishonest for John to use "and stayed with Him that day" with reference to only two hours. John uses Roman time, so this is 10 a.m., which means that Jesus spent most of the day with just those two men. You had better believe they were talking the whole time. Jesus knew they would be two of His disciples and was already investing in them—to such good effect that the next day they brought in two more.

4:1 Now when Jesus^b knew that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John" 2 (although Jesus Himself was not

will be more privileged than all except Adam, because the earth will return to conditions similar to Eden.

^a Presumably Jesus waited for them to catch up, so He was observing them during that time. His purpose in passing by there was precisely to attract those two men (so I imagine), and He was doubtless aware when they started out after Him.

^b I follow the best line of transmission in reading "Jesus", rather than 'the Lord', albeit with only 21.7% of the Greek manuscripts.

baptizing, but His disciples),^a 3 He left Judea and went away into Galilee.^a 4 Now He needed to go through Samaria;^b 5 so He comes to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.^c 6 Now Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, being worn out from the journey, sat as He was by the well. **It was about 6 p.m.**

The Text has “the sixth hour”. Many versions put “noon”, which reflects Jewish time. But the Text says Jesus was worn out, which agrees better with a full day's walk than with a half day's walk (remember that they did all their travelling on foot, and so were used to it). The distance between Salem and Sychar was probably about 35 miles, as the crow flies, but since the whole distance was over accidented terrain, the walking distance would be a good deal more. They had walked some 50 miles in twelve hours. Like the Text says, He was tired! And He was hot and thirsty. John emphasizes that as a human being He felt the full effects of the day. But where did I get Salem?

3:22 After these things Jesus, with His disciples, went into the Judean countryside, and there He spent time with them and baptized. 23 Now John also was baptizing in Aenon, near Salem, because there was plenty of water there. And *people* were coming and being baptized; 24 for John had not yet been thrown into prison.

To this day there is “plenty of water” in the Aijalon valley, some 15-20 miles WNW of Jerusalem (Salem is an ancient name for Jerusalem; see Genesis 14:18 and Hebrews 7:1)—perhaps that is where it was. I take it that Jesus and John were in the same area, at this point (“John also was baptizing in Aenon”). Even from the nearest point in Judea to Sychar, it is unlikely that they could have walked the distance in six hours.

4:46 So Jesus went again to Cana of Galilee,^d where He made the water wine. Now there was a certain royal official whose son was sick in Capernaum. 47 When this man heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son,^e for he was about to die. 48 So Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders you will not believe!” 49 The official says to Him, “Sir, come down before my child dies!” 50 Jesus says to him, “Go; your son lives”. Well the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and off he went. 51 Now while he was still going down his slaves met him and reported saying, “Your son lives!” 52 So he inquired of them the hour in which he got better. And they said to him, “Yesterday **at the seventh hour** the fever left him”. 53 So the father knew that it was at the exact hour in which Jesus told him, “Your son lives”. Both he himself and his whole household believed.

^a This was a tactical withdrawal. I take it that Matthew 4:12 refers to the same withdrawal. Between John 3:36 and 4:1 the Baptizer was imprisoned. If the Pharisees knew something it would not be long before Herod knew it. It was not part of the Plan for Jesus to have to deal with Herod at this juncture.

^b He could have gone up the coast and avoided most of the mountains, but He “needed” to go through Samaria. Probably because the Father told Him to—it was harvest time in Sychar.

^c See Joshua 24:32.

^d I suspect that He had a brother-in-law living there.

^e The man was asking Jesus to make an emergency hike of some 25 miles (unless he was mounted and had brought an extra horse for Jesus; but He probably was not used to riding). Evidently he figured that the healer had to be physically present.

It is virtually certain that the official and his slaves used Roman time, in which case the cure took place at 7 p.m. It could not be 7 a.m. because the man would have met his slaves before noon and they would have said ‘today’, not ‘yesterday’ (verse 52). It could not be Jewish time for a similar reason—if Jesus healed at 1 p.m., the man would have met his slaves before sundown and they would have said ‘today’ (an official may well have been mounted, and it would not take him long—he was in a hurry). The man probably walked (unless he was mounted, but at night the horse would be held to a walk) during at least part of the night; the slaves would have started out at dawn; they probably met at a point much closer to Capernaum than to Cana.

19:12 From that moment Pilate really tried to release Him; but the Jews kept shouting, saying: “If you release this fellow you are no friend of Caesar’s! Whoever makes himself a king is opposing Caesar!”^a 13 Well, upon hearing this statement Pilate led Jesus outside and sat down on the judgment seat, in a place called ‘Stone Pavement’, while in Hebrew ‘*Gabatha*’^b 14 (now it was the day of preparation for the Passover;^c **the hour was about six a.m.**), and he says to the Jews, “Look at your king!”

The Text says “the sixth hour”, which in Roman time is six a.m. If it were Jewish time, it would be noon, which won’t work here. Actually it says ‘around’ or ‘about’ six—I assume that it was a little after the hour. But why do I say that ‘noon’ won’t work? Any honest interpreter of Scripture has the obligation to consider all relevant passages, which in this case include Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:25 and 33, and Luke 23:44. Mark specifies that Jesus was crucified at the 3rd hour and all three mention the supernatural darkness from the 6th to the 9th. It is clear that all three use Jewish time: the darkness could not have been from 6:00 to 9:00 a.m., nor from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. (using Roman time). Therefore the supernatural darkness occurred between 12:00 noon and 3:00 p.m. Since Mark uses Jewish time, his 3rd hour has to be 9:00 a.m. (it obviously could not be 9:00 p.m.). To argue that John used Jewish time here makes him out to be ridiculous; how could Pilate pass sentence three hours after the crucifixion?! Please remember that John was physically present, an eyewitness of the proceedings, which cannot be said of any of the commentators or translators (or of any of the non-biblical sources that they may cite).

To conclude, the evidence is surely adequate: John used Roman time.^d To ascribe errors of fact and stupidities to the Apostle John, by alleging that he used Jewish time, is to be perverse.

^a Oops! Pilate owed his position to Caesar’s good graces, and simply could not afford to do something that could be construed (even with a little twisting) as treason. He is beaten and knows it.

^b This action signaled that he had reached a decision and was about to give the verdict.

^c If the Jews were still preparing for the Passover, then Jesus and His disciples observed it a day early—which must have seemed strange to the disciples. But as the ultimate Passover Lamb, it would be appropriate for Jesus to die on that preparation day.

^d I fail to see any reasonable basis for an honest student of Scripture to arrive at the conclusion that John used Jewish time. So where did the 90% of commentaries and 95% of Bible versions get that idea? In spiritual matters there is no neutrality (Matthew 12:30, Luke 11:23).

43) 'Lament', not 'weep'

Matthew 5:4

The question before us is to understand what Jesus meant. We must interpret it from Jesus' point of view, not ours, or anyone else's. The 'lament' here is not crying because you are hurting; nor is it crying in mourning because you lost a loved one. It is lamentation for evil and sin, and the consequences of both. The 'Bible' that Jesus had was the Old Testament, and that is where we must look for the definition of the word.

We can start with Ezra. In 9:1-4 Ezra learns of the sin of the people.^a In 9:5-15 we have a prayer with identification. Ezra prays, confessing the sin of the people, and as the leader he includes his person in the confession, even though he did not participate in the sin he was confessing. In 10:1 we have Ezra praying, making confession and weeping, prostrate before the house of God. Now note especially 10.6—Ezra isolates himself, does not eat bread or drink water, "for he mourned because of the guilt (infidelity) of those from the captivity." Here we have a concrete case of lamentation for sin and its consequences.

Now consider Daniel. In 9:3 he addressed the Lord God with prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. In 9:4-19 we have another prayer with identification. Daniel prays, confessing the sin of his people, including himself in the confession, even though the sin was not his personally. In 9:20-27 Daniel receives a visit and a communication from the angel Gabriel. Perhaps three years later, at 10.2, Daniel affirms that he himself spent three weeks mourning, fasting all the time. Certainly he was not bemoaning any of his own problems; it was because of evil and its consequences.

Now Jeremiah 7:28-29—"This is a nation that does not obey the voice of Jehovah their God nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth. Cut off your hair and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on the desolate heights; for Jehovah has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath." The sin of the people went so far as to provoke the wrath of God, so much so that He turned his back on that generation. Here we have another case of lamentation for sin and its consequences.

Now consider two texts that link comfort to lamentation. Isaiah 57:18 says, "I will restore comforts to him and to his mourners". In Luke 4:18-19 Jesus applied the prophecy in Isaiah 61:1-2 to Himself, but He did not quote the entire prophecy. I here use 61.2-3: the Messiah was anointed: "to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

But exactly how does comfort and solace work? Before paying attention to comfort in this life, let us consider the coming one. When someone laments evil and sin, it is evident that he is on God's side, seeing how He sees. For such people, ultimate and total comfort will come in Heaven. In Revelation 21:4 the great voice from Heaven declares: "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there will be no more death nor sorrow nor weeping nor pain—they will exist no more, because the first things have passed away".

We may start with Luke 16:25—"But Abraham said: 'Child, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus had bad things; but now it is he who is being comforted, and you tormented.'" The account of the rich man

^a Both 9:4 and 10:3 mention the portion of the people who trembled at the words of the God of Israel – it is the 'humble spirit'.

and the beggar Lazarus begins in verse 19 and ends in verse 31. In verse 25 both had already died and were in Hades, the 'waiting room' where the spirits of the departed await the final judgment. But since one's final destination is determined by what was done in life, the lost are already separated from the saved. A presumed criminal suffers in prison, even before the case is judged. On the other hand, the saints already receive benefits in advance—which is why Lazarus was already receiving comfort.

Now we go to 2 Thessalonians 1:4-8:

“We ourselves boast about you among God’s congregations, referring to your steadfastness and faith in the midst of all your persecutions, and the tribulations that you are enduring 5—the above is evidence that God’s judgment is right, to the end that you be considered worthy of the Kingdom of God, on behalf of which you are actually suffering; 6 since to God it is right to pay back affliction to those who are afflicting you 7 and rest (along with us) to you who are being afflicted, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels in blazing fire, 8 inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is at the time of the second coming of the Lord Jesus that those who have suffered for the sake of the Gospel will enter into their rest. Then they will have permanent comfort, but they will also have the 'comfort' of seeing their persecutors punished. In fact, the certainty that evil will be punished helps us to withstand mistreatment while still alive. Asaph's Psalm 73 clearly addresses this.

In the first verse, Asaph gives the final conclusion so that the reader will not be shaken by what follows. In verses 2-14 he recounts the struggle he had, seeing the prosperity of the wicked while he, seeking to be righteous, suffered. In verses 15-16 he thinks of the negative effect on others if he speaks his mind. Now verse 17: “Until I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end (the fate of the wicked)”. Verses 18-20 deal with the destruction of the wicked. In verses 21-22 Asaph confesses his sin, and verses 23-26 speak of his spiritual restoration. Verses 27-28 conclude the Psalm with appropriate conclusions. We can take comfort in the certainty that evil will be punished, but far more important is the spiritual comfort we receive when we walk with God. 2 Chronicles 7:14 and 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 also speak of the comfort we receive in this life, when we lament evil.

Jonah 3:7-9 provides us with a very interesting practical example. Remembering the context: God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach against it. Jonah goes, but very grudgingly. He delivers the message brutally. Then a miracle happened: the Ninevites repented, starting with the king. Just look at Jonah 3:7-9:

“By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who

can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?"

Verse 10 says that in fact God relented from destroying them at that time. There was lamentation over sin, and there was comfort. They trembled at the Word of God!

To conclude, consider what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 11:29—"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." That rest works throughout this lifetime, as well as for eternity. Oh praise God!

44) Luke 24:46-47

A friend recently phoned me to ask if I had a solution for what appeared to be a problem in Luke 24:46-47. In the NKJV it reads like this: Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." I believe that most versions (including my own^a) have essentially the same thing. The 'problem' is that such a translation places the content of what Jesus said in the OT, where it is not to be found. Jesus is made to affirm a falsehood, definitely out of character, to say the least! On the spur of the moment, I had no answer for my friend, but I promised to look into it. Here is the result.

I believe it is generally agreed that a series of nouns linked by 'and', each having the definite article, refers to distinct entities. The baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19 gives a nice example: "of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit".^b The normal meaning of the compound phrase is that the three entities are distinct; each one is distinct from the other two.^c

I submit for due consideration that the same holds true for a series of nouns, or phrases, linked by 'and', when the same preposition is repeated for each one. I suggest that Galatians 6:16 offers a fair example: "peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God". "Them" and "the Israel of God" refer to distinct groups of people.^d

I submit for further consideration that the same adverb, overtly repeated, and linked by 'and', will function in a similar way; which brings me back to our 'problem'. The Text has: οὕτως γεγραπται και οὕτως εδει παθειν τον Χριστον. Lamentably, the eclectic text currently in vogue omits και οὕτως εδει, following 0.5% of the extant Greek manuscripts, all of which are of objectively inferior quality.^e The 99.5% are certainly correct. In verse 44 Jesus tells the Eleven that the OT had to be fulfilled. Verse 45 has: "Then He opened their understanding so as to comprehend the Scriptures," and verse 46 continues, "and He said to them:

^a So it was in the first two editions; now corrected.

^b Because Greek grammar has case, the preposition here is part of the definite article, in the Greek Text.

^c In passing, please note that the compound phrase is subordinate to "the name of", 'the name' being singular. So here we have a presentation of the Trinity: three persons representing one 'name' or essence. We have it on the word of the resurrected Christ!

^d In the Greek Text, the preposition 'upon' is overtly repeated.

^e What objective basis did the editors have for following 7 manuscripts (of objectively inferior quality) against 1,600 better ones? None. How could they perpetrate such an atrocity? The answer may be found in Ephesians 2:2.

‘Thus it was written. And so it was necessary for the Christ to suffer’ The ‘thus it was written’ refers back to the content of verses 44-45 and closes the topic. The second ‘thus’ opens a new topic, so the material that follows is not attributed to the OT. The ‘problem’ that our incorrect translations create is spurious.

That said, however, the eclectic text maintains and imposes the problem. Versions that follow that text will have something like this: And He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day.” Beyond question, any such rendering makes Jesus affirm a falsehood. Is that not perverse?

45) Mary’s genealogy

Luke 3:23

Και αὐτὸς ἦν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ὡσεὶ ἐτῶν τριακοντὰ ἀρχομενός, ὡν ὡς ἐνομίζετο υἱὸς Ἰωσήφ, τοῦ Ἡλεὶ, τοῦ Ματθαῖον, τοῦ Λευὶ, τοῦ Μέλχι,

There are four words here that invite special attention: *καὶ*, *αὐτὸς*, *ἦν* and *ὡς*. Since verse 22 ends with a statement from the Father at Jesus’ baptism, it is clear that verse 23 begins another section. But the conjunction that signals the transition is *καὶ* and not *δέ*, as one would expect—this means that ‘Jesus’ continues as the topic. But in that event, how does one explain the personal pronoun *αὐτὸς*, the more so in such an emphatic position? If the author’s purpose was simply to register Jesus as a son of Joseph, as many suppose, why didn’t he just write *καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἦν υἱὸς Ἰωσήφ*, etc.?

But then, why write *ὡς ἐνομίζετο*? It seems to me that the normal meaning of “as was supposed” is to affirm that Jesus was in fact Joseph’s son; but that is precisely what Jesus **was not**. Luke has already made clear that Jesus’ real Father was the Holy Spirit—1:34-35, 43, 45; 2:49. So what Luke is really saying is that although the people supposed Jesus to be Joseph’s son, He actually had a different lineage—we should translate “so it was supposed”. (Recall that a faithful and loyal translation seeks to transmit correctly the meaning intended by the author.)

The verb *ἦν* is the only independent one in the whole paragraph, verses 23-38. Is it working with the participle *ἀρχομενός* in a periphrastic construction? That appears to be the tendency of the eclectic text that places the participle right after Jesus (following less than 2% of the Greek MSS), which makes Jesus out to be in fact Joseph’s son. It seems to me to be far more natural to take the participial clauses as being circumstantial: “beginning at about thirty years of age” and “being (so it was supposed) a son of Joseph”. Setting those two clauses aside, the independent clause that remains is *ἦν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοῦ Ἡλεὶ*, “Jesus was of Eli”.

The participle ‘beginning’ requires an object, that the Text leaves implicit; from the context it seems clear that we may supply ‘His ministry’, or some such thing, which is why most versions do so. I suggest the following rendering: “Beginning *His ministry* at about thirty years of age, being (so it was supposed) a son of Joseph, Jesus was actually of Eli, of Mathan, of Levi. . . .” I take it that the emphatic pronoun *αὐτὸς* heightens the contrast between what the people imagined and the reality. Jesus was a grandson of Eli, Mary’s father—Luke gives the genealogy of Jesus through His mother, while Matthew gives it through His stepfather. Jesus received some of David’s genes through Mary and Nathan; the glorified body now at the Father’s right hand, and that will one day occupy David’s throne, has some of his genes.

The eclectic text gives our verse a different wording: *και αυτος ην Ιησους αρχομενος ωσει ετων τριακοντα, ων υιος, ως ενομιζετο, Ιωσηφ του Ηλι του Ματθαυ του Λευι του Μελχι...* The RSV translates it like this: “Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat...” Is not the normal meaning of this rendering that Jesus was in fact the son of Joseph? However, every version that I recall seeing has “Joseph, the son of Heli”, which directly contradicts Matthew, “Jacob begot Joseph”. The word ‘son’ (without the article) occurs only with Joseph, although most versions supply it on down the genealogy. But Luke is precisely correct in not using it, because it would not hold for the first and last names in the list—Eli did not beget Jesus (nor Joseph) and God did not beget Adam.

So then, properly understood Luke does not contradict Matthew (with reference to Joseph’s father), nor does he affirm an error of fact (with reference to Jesus’ father).

46) **‘Meek’ is not ‘weak’ – Matthew 5:5**

What we need to understand is what Jesus intended to say. We need to interpret from His point of view, not ours, or anyone else’s. First: ‘meek’ is not ‘weak’, it is power under control. A little kitten is merely weak; a lion can act in a meek way, with its claws withdrawn (with animals we use ‘tame’). Further, to be meek is not to remain passive in the presence of evil, nor is it to remain inert when God is working on you. It could be the lack of personal ambition, but that does not jive with the second half of the verse. Second: “inherit the earth” is not a synonym for ‘go to heaven’ (nor for receiving spiritual blessings); the earth is one thing and Heaven is another (and spiritual life yet another). Also, ‘the’ earth (the Text has the definite article) must refer to this present earth, not to a new or different one. Surely, because there is only this earth in the context, and the Apocalypse would not be written for another 60 years.

We may begin with Moses. Numbers 12:3 says: “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth”.^a Hey, wait a minute! How could he be the meekest man on the planet? He could, precisely because he was also the most powerful man on the planet, in his day. Moses was not weak, he was meek. Further, he did not remain passive in the presence of evil, nor did he remain inert while God was working on him.

Then there is Sovereign Jesus, while He walked this earth. Matthew 11:29 says: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”. Jesus declared Himself to be ‘meek’. Can anyone imagine that Jesus was weak? I think not! Much like Moses, Jesus was meek precisely because He was the most powerful, in His day. It is more than clear that He did not remain passive in the presence of evil, nor did He remain inert about the suffering determined by the Father.

Very well, meek is power under control, but just how can the meek ‘inherit the earth’? To begin, they will need power, lots of power. Then, they will need to know how to make use of that power. Surely, because in order to inherit the earth they will have to take it out of Satan’s hand. Has anyone forgotten Luke 4:6? While Satan was testing Jesus he offered Him the world, saying, “because it was handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I want to!” Recall that Jesus did not deny Satan’s right to do so. It is true that Jesus won the victory over Satan by the cross

^a Taken from the translation of the Jewish Publication Society.

and the resurrection, but for His own reasons God permits Satan to continue operating in this world as if he were still the owner. It is up to us to oblige the enemy to acknowledge his defeat. It is up to us to “undo the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8); yes, because Jesus said, “Just as the Father sent me, I also send you” (John 20:21). Well then, where is the necessary power for doing it?

We may begin with Ephesians 3:20—“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to the power that is working in us, to Him be the glory in the Church in Christ Jesus, . . .” The range of my imagination represents my personal limit; obviously I will not ask for something that I cannot even imagine. But the power that is working in me (us) “is able to do immeasurably more”. In other words, on God’s side the power is unlimited. It is on our side that the business fails. We do not know how to ask, or what to ask for, and even less how to use such power. But that the power is available to us, yes it is.

Consider Ephesians 1:19-21. Paul is praying for the Ephesians, and he asks that they may be able to know three things, including:

What the exceeding greatness of His power into us who are believing, according to the demonstration of the extent of His might which He exercised in the Christ when He raised Him[S] from among the dead and seated Him at His[F] right, in the heavenly realms, far above every ruler and authority and power and dominion^a—even every name that can be named, not only in this age but also in the next.

The Text does actually say “power into us who are believing”—please note that the power is to be within us, but the verb ‘believe’ is in the present tense; that you believed yesterday is not enough, you must be believing today. Note also Christ’s present position: at the Father’s right, far above any and all ranks and names, which includes the angelic beings and Satan himself. Now consider Ephesians 2:5-6—“But God, . . . made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up together and seated us together in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus”. This is tremendous! Here we have our position and authority. If we are in Christ we are at the Father’s right, and therefore we too are above the enemy and all his host.

Now consider Luke 10:19—“Take note, I am giving^b you the authority to trample on snakes and scorpions,^c and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing

^a It is generally understood that the reference is to the angelic hierarchy. The two thirds that remained faithful to God were never a problem, so presumably the special point is that Christ defeated Satan, with his one third, and is now (as the God/man, the second Adam) seated ‘far above’ that enemy.

^b Instead of ‘am giving’, perhaps 2.5% of the Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality, have ‘have given’ (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.)—a serious error. Jesus said this perhaps five months before His death and resurrection, addressing the seventy (not just the twelve). The Lord was talking about the future, not the past; a future that includes us!

^c The Lord gives us the authority to “trample snakes and scorpions”. Well now, to smash the literal insect, a scorpion, you do not need power from on High, just a slipper (if you are fast you can do it barefoot). To trample a snake I prefer a boot, but we can kill literal snakes without supernatural help. It becomes obvious that Jesus was referring to something other than reptiles and insects. I understand Mark 16:18 to be referring to the same reality—Jesus declares that certain signs will accompany the believers (the turn of phrase virtually has the effect of commands): they will expel demons, they will speak strange languages, they will remove ‘snakes’, they will place hands on the sick. (“If they drink . . .” is not a command; it refers to an eventuality.) But what did the Lord Jesus mean by ‘snakes’?

In a list of distinct activities Jesus had already referred to demons, so the ‘snakes’ must be something else. In Matthew 12:34 Jesus called the Pharisees a ‘brood of vipers’, and in 23:33, ‘snakes, brood of vipers’. In John 8:44, after they claimed God as their father, Jesus said, “You are of your father the devil”. And 1 John 3:10 makes clear that Satan has many other ‘sons’. In Revelation 20:2 we

at all may harm you.” Since Jesus has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18), He is certainly competent to delegate some of that authority to us. Now then, authority gives orders to power. Since Satan’s power is a malignant power, we should not think of using it to do good; to do good we have the power of Christ, that is *far* greater. I believe that we should use our delegated authority to **prohibit** the use of Satan’s power, against us and in other circumstances —based on my own experience, I would say that it is necessary to be specific. When Jesus said “and nothing at all may harm you”, I take it that He was presupposing that we would be using our delegated authority to forbid any initiative against us. I do this every day. However, the protection is not absolute; every now and again my Owner allows the enemy to get to me. And why would God do that? I understand that it is to keep me humble and dependent.

But just how do we manage to ‘inherit the earth’? How much space can a solitary person occupy? For example, in order to transform a neighborhood, I suppose it will require a collective effort from the ‘meek’ who live there. By definition, the ‘meek’ are people who know how to use God’s power and are disposed to do so. They should also know how to be guided by the Holy Spirit. And it will be even better if at least one of them is maintaining an intimate relationship with God to the point that he can know what the Father is doing (John 5:19).^a Still, in general terms, since “the Son of God was manifested for this purpose: to undo the devil’s works” (1 John 3:8), I believe that we may and should take action against anything that is of the enemy. Since God Himself hates “all workers of iniquity” (Psalm 5:5), I take it that we also can and should do so.^b And in Psalm 97:10 we have a command to hate evil. So how may we remain passive in the presence of evil if we are commanded to hate it? And then there is the very nature of *agape* love: it necessarily includes the hating of evil, because of the consequences of evil against the loved ones.

Let us give a little more thought to the idea of remaining passive in the presence of evil. In Ephesians 6:10-11 we are commanded to “be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power” and to “put on the full armor of God”. What for? Consider 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

Well, we do walk about in flesh, but we do not wage war that way,^c 4 because the weapons of our warfare are not physical, but are powerful in God for

read: “He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is a slanderer, even Satan, who deceives the whole inhabited earth, and bound him for a thousand years.” If Satan is a snake, then his children are also snakes. So then, I take it that our ‘snakes’ are human beings who chose to serve Satan, who sold themselves to evil. I conclude that the ‘snakes’ in Luke 10:19 are the same as those in Mark 16:18, but what of the ‘scorpions’? Since they also are of the enemy, they may be demons, in which case the term may well include their offspring, the humanoids [see my paper, “In the Days of Noah”, available from prunch.org]. I am still working on the question of just how the removal is done.

^a Psalm 32:8-9 also deals with intimacy: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with my eye. Do not be like the horse . . . whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle.” To guide with the eye requires intimacy, and to develop intimacy requires time.

^b In John 6:44 Sovereign Jesus declared: “No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”. (With objects the verb ‘draw’ means ‘drag’.) So, would the Father ‘draw’ someone that He hates?

^c Well, at least we shouldn’t!

demolishing strongholds:^a 5 demolishing sophistries^b and every arrogance that sets itself up against the knowledge of God; taking captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”^c

If we have weapons for waging war, it is because we are supposed to be doing it! Psalm 78:9-10 is to the point: “The children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They did not keep the covenant of God; they refused to walk in His law.” God considered those men to be traitors; by refusing to fight, albeit well armed, they broke the covenant. So there it is: if we have weapons for waging war, it is because we are supposed to be doing it! Of course, because the enemy of our souls never stops attacking us; never.

But just how does one go about forbidding and undoing the enemy’s works? As part of the armor described in Ephesians 6 we find “the sword of the Spirit” (verse 17). A sword is a weapon for offense, although it is also used for defense. Now the Text declares that this sword is “the $\rho\eta\mu\alpha$ of God”— $\rho\eta\mu\alpha$, not $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$. It is God’s Word spoken, or applied in a specific way. Really, what good is a sword left in its sheath? However marvelous our Sword may be (Hebrews 4:12), to produce effect it must come out of the scabbard. The Word needs to be spoken, or written—applied in a specific way.

In the Bible we have many examples where people brought the power of God into action by speaking. Our world began with a creative word from God—spoken (Genesis, 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26; and see Hebrews 11:3). Moses did a lot of speaking. Elijah spoke (1 Kings 17:1, 18:36, 2 Kings 1:10). Elisha spoke (2 Kings 2:14, 21, 24; 4:16, 43; 6:19). Jesus did a great deal of speaking. Ananias spoke (Acts 9:17). Peter spoke (Acts 9:34, 40). Paul spoke (Acts 13:11; 14:3, 10; 16:18; 20:10; 28:8). In short, we need to speak!

Here in Brazil, there are said to be many millions of ‘believers’ (up to 35), but they evidently are making very little difference in the national life. Satan controls all the governments—federal, state, county. Satan controls the education, the instruction, at all levels (beginning with the nurseries). Satan controls the health services, the commerce, the media, the culture, the entertainment, and a fair share of the churches—any church with a pastor who is a Freemason is in Satan’s hand (in Brazil a very great many pastors are Freemasons). Well dear me, how may it be possible to ‘inherit the earth’ in a country like Brazil? What can we do in concrete terms so as to change that reality?

I would like to offer a proposal, as follows. Consider the public schools in a given town, both grade and high. It has been a while since they were taken over by demons, drugs, sex, crime violence—the teachers have a hard time to even maintain a semblance of order; to teach something constructive has become almost

^a The subject of biblical spiritual warfare is generally not well understood in Christian circles. Much of what has been written concerns defensive procedures, but this text speaks of demolishing strongholds (presumably the enemy’s, since no one will want to destroy his own), that has to do with taking the offensive. For more on this subject the reader may consult my site: www.prunch.org.

^b A sophistry is a false argument that is presented in such a way as to appear correct, and impressive, especially if not properly analyzed. Satan has purveyed a number of sophistries designed to keep people from the knowledge of God, such as humanism, relativism, materialism, Freudianism, and so on.

^c I suppose that the two gerunds—‘demolishing sophistries’ and ‘taking captive every thought’—are some of our weapons, being grammatically subordinated to ‘demolishing strongholds’. In the context, the thoughts we take captive are not our own (though that also is a good thing to do), but those of the enemy’s servants. I do this in so many words, aloud or in thought, and thereby avoid unnecessary complications.

impossible. The time has come for a collective effort by the 'meek' who live in that town. With the authority and the power available to them, they can clean up their schools: they should send the demons to the Abyss, forbidding any others to take their place; they should declare the premises to be off limits to any drug, illicit sex, indecent conduct, crime, violence, and whatever else the local situation dictates; thereupon the teachers can get back to teaching, in an ambient of peace and respect. Now then, in neighboring towns there will be no lack of distressed parents, seeing their children being damaged at school. When they hear of the transformation going on in the schools of the neighboring town, what will they do? They will run over to find out how it was achieved; and in that way the transformation will spread. What was done in the schools can be done in other areas as well; health, commerce, government, and so on, until the whole country is changed, thereby inheriting the land where they live.^a

"The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1). Really now, how many believers do you know who conduct themselves like lions? A lion can act in a tame way, but can also be a fearsome beast. The prophet Elijah was a lion type, and the third captain fell on his knees before him (2 Kings 1:13). A lion type believer knows that he can be bold because "the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9). "Since God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31). So take courage! Have at it!

47) Merciful receives mercy

Matthew 5:7

It seems clear that the purpose of this 'beatitude' is to encourage mercy. We need to understand the difference between grace and mercy. To receive grace is to be awarded an undeserved benefit (deserved benefit is salary). On the other hand, to be contemplated with mercy is to not receive a deserved punishment, a negative consequence of what was done. Part of the importance of this 'beatitude' derives from the fact that the opposite is also true: whoever is not merciful will also not receive mercy. Consider.

In Psalm 18:25, which is a copy of 2 Samuel 22:26, the correct translation would be this: "With the merciful you will show yourself merciful." In Hosea 6:6, which is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7, we read: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings". Consider also Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does Jehovah require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" But in Luke 6:36 the Lord Jesus sets the standard at the highest possible level: "So be compassionate, even as your Father is compassionate!" Attention, thinking that a goal or standard is beyond our reach does not invalidate that standard—any standard set by God is independent of human capability.

In James 2:12-13 we read: "Speak and act as being those who are about to be judged by a law of liberty 13 (the judgment will be without mercy to the one not

^a I happen to believe that we will participate in the administration of the Messianic Kingdom, as well as of the new earth, but that is a different topic.

showing mercy).^a *That law exalts mercy^b over judgment.*” This agrees with the description of Himself that Jehovah gave Moses on that rarest of occasions: “Jehovah, God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation” (Exodus 34:6-7). He keeps mercy to the 1000th generation, He punishes to the 4th; the proportion is 250:1. Hence the importance of mercy in our behavior.

The statement made in James 2:13 is terrible: “judgment will be without mercy to the one not showing mercy.” I believe this applies mainly to those who have received mercy. The parable inserted in Matthew 18:21-35 is relevant. The king forgave a terribly large sum to the first slave, who in turn did not want to forgive a paltry sum to a fellow slave. In verse 33 the king addresses the first one like this: “Were you not obligated to have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?” The fact that God has forgiven me obliges me to forgive others.^c

48) Peter’s mother-in-law

Matthew 8:14-15 X Mark 1:29-31, Luke 4:38-39

For most of my adult life, I assumed that Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law only once, until one day it occurred to me that some of the details do not match. Consider: although the details of the actual healing are slightly different in the three accounts, they could be harmonized to come out with a single episode; it is the context that differs. Mark and Luke have the same context; the healing they record took place not long after the ministry in Samaria (John chapter four), but certainly before the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ recorded by Matthew. The context for the healing in Matthew is quite different, and happened after that ‘Sermon’. As recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke, I would say that the events occurring between the two healings occupy the following stretches of Text: Matthew 4:23-8:13, Mark 1:32-45 and Luke 4:40-5:15. I see a practical application to this: just because God heals you one time does not mean that you will never get sick again (even with the same problem).

49) Poor in spirit

Matthew 5:3

The question before us is to understand what Jesus meant. We must interpret it from Jesus’ point of view, not ours, or anyone else’s. To be ‘poor in spirit’ means to have a humble spirit. It is not about money, it is about attitude. The Bible that Jesus had was the Old Testament, and that is where we should look for the definition of the phrase.

Isaiah 66:1-2 – Thus says Jehovah: “Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. Where is the house that you will build for me? And where is the

^a Even though inserted as an aside, this is a very serious bit of information!

^b Perhaps 20% of the Greek manuscripts have ‘mercy’ in the nominative case, making it the subject of the verb (as in most versions), but some 80%, including the best line of transmission, have ‘mercy’ in the accusative case, making it the direct object (which to me makes much better sense).

^c In Luke 9:52-56 we find a negative example. The “sons of thunder”, James and John, wanted to destroy the village, but Jesus immediately rebuked them.

place of my rest? For all these things my hand has made, and all those things exist," says Jehovah. "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word."

Jehovah identifies himself as the Creator of everything, and then says what kind of person He wants. The word 'poor' is allied to 'contrite', but the fundamental requirement is to tremble at the Word of God. A person who 'trembles' like this is acknowledging that this Word exercises objective authority over him.

Psalm 34:18 goes in the same direction: "Jehovah is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit". Psalm 51:17 also: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart—these, O God, you will not despise". And Isaiah 57:15 also: "Thus says the High and Lofty One, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones". And this matches 2 Chronicles 16:9: "The eyes of Jehovah run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him". God is looking for whom He can bless. This is what is also found in James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5 and Proverbs 3:34: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble".

Now then, Jesus said the Kingdom of God belongs to such people. If the Kingdom is theirs, they are part of that kingdom. No one enters the Kingdom without having a humble spirit, but not everyone who has a humble spirit enters the Kingdom, not necessarily. We must remember that no benefit from the shed blood of the Lamb of God is automatic—everything is potential. God's promises need to be appropriated, but on the way the preconditions have to be met. God's part is guaranteed, but not ours; there are levels of appropriation. Remember the parable of the sower, or of the soils; the seeds that fell into the good soil produced at different levels—100%, 60%, 30%.

Consider Matthew 18:3—"Assuredly I say to you, unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of the heavens." But why would Jesus have used a little child as a model? Well, they are literalists, they truly believe, they are dependent and teachable—we also have to understand that we are dependent on God, being open to His teachings; we must genuinely believe in His Word, taking that word literally (respecting the norms of language), knowing that this word is to be obeyed. And as we do so we will find that we are being blessed.

But how would all this work for an Indian lost in the jungle, who has never heard of Jesus, a God who loves us, but who sets standards of conduct—never, nothing. Consider Acts 10:34-35: this is the case of the centurion Cornelius. After hearing his explanation, Peter declared: "Really, I comprehend that God is not One to show partiality, but in every ethnic nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is acceptable to Him." Cornelius lived up to the light that he had, and God performed a miracle to give him more light. The same thing happened to the Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8:26-39) – he lived up to the light that he had, and God performed a miracle to give him more light.

It is true that both Cornelius and the Ethiopian had some access to the Bible, which the Indian would not have. But everyone is born with a conscience, and everyone has the light of creation, Romans 1:20. There are cases in the annals of modern missions where God worked a miracle to bring more light to someone who was living up to the little light that he had. Our God is just. Jehovah's eyes roam

the entire earth, seeing each ethnic group and the people who make it up, and He reaches out to anyone who is deserving it.

50) Poor Pilate—wrong place, wrong time

According to John 18:12, there was a *chiliarch* among those who went to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus. Well now, a *chiliarch* commanded a thousand men (or perhaps a cohort, about 600). There would scarcely be more than one of them stationed in Jerusalem, so he was presumably the top commanding military officer in town. So what was the top military commander doing in Gethsemane at 2:00 a.m.? If he was there, it was because the governor, Pilate, had sent him. And why would Pilate do something like that? He had his reasons.

As governor, Pilate represented the Roman Empire. He was responsible for keeping the peace, according to Caesar's interests. In those days the city of Jerusalem was not very big, and keeping well informed would not have been difficult. Pilate was doubtless well aware of Jesus, and would have followed His career with attention. Someone with a large public following could be a threat. Moreover, since it was the chief priests' man who led the expedition, and they kept the prisoner, it is clear that they had gone to Pilate and convinced him that Jesus represented enough of a threat that something needed to be done about it. (Jesus had used violence in cleansing the temple, as well as totally disregarding their authority. Why would He not do the same against Rome?) Even so, just why Pilate decided to send his *chiliarch* is hard to say; perhaps to be sure that things were done professionally, as well as to form a professional opinion as to the nature of the threat. Certain it is that Pilate and the chief priests had agreed on a plan of action, as John makes clear, a plan that included death by crucifixion.

Both Mark 15:1 and John 18:28 inform us that it was early morning when Jesus was taken to Pilate, but John 19:14 states that it was around 6:00 a.m. when Pilate pronounced sentence. Even allowing that 'around' 6:00 was perhaps five or ten minutes after the hour, it could not have been later than 5:30 when the chief priests pounded on Pilate's door. Now then, we all know that one just does not go pounding on a governor's door at such an hour, especially a conquered people. Not only that, Pilate was dressed and waiting. Actually, he had doubtless been up, waiting for the *chiliarch's* report. But at that point he changed the game-plan. He went out and asked, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" (John 18:29). Their reply was petulant, "If he were not an evil-doer we would not have handed him over to you." They thought that they had an agreement, but something had made Pilate change his mind.

To understand what happened, we need to go back to Gethsemane, and the *chiliarch*. The traitor had told them that there would be eleven men besides Jesus, and that they had two swords (Luke 22:38). But they were country bumpkins with no fighting ability. Even so, the *chiliarch* probably had over twice as many men, and all were armed—he doubtless expected some attempt at resistance. When they arrived and stated their business, Jesus calmly identified Himself, but at His word they all fell to the ground (John 18:6). Later, after the traitor's kiss, Peter managed to slice off an ear, but not only did Jesus tell him to quit it, He healed the ear (Luke 22:51)! Then the disciples abandoned Jesus, and He allowed Himself to be bound, without resistance. So what sort of report would the *chiliarch* give to Pilate? It was more than obvious that Jesus was no wild-eyed insurrectionist. He had supernatural power, and yet submitted peacefully. And Jesus was impressive!

Pilate had to conclude that the picture that the chief priests had painted was wrong, and so the agreement could not stand.

Now a *chiliarch* was a hardened and seasoned warrior, not easily impressed. He probably told Pilate that if it were up to him, he would leave Jesus alone! But Pilate had to deal with the chief priests, and he knew it would not be easy. In Acts 3:13 Peter affirms that Pilate was determined to let Jesus go, but the chief priests got what they wanted in the end. Close attention to the Record makes clear that Peter's affirmation is correct. Pilate wanted no part of killing Jesus! He made repeated attempts to 'get off the hook'. Consider:

- 1) Pilate answered their petulant response with, "You take him and judge him according to your law." To this they responded, "We are not permitted to execute anyone." This exchange indicates that execution had been in the agreement, but Pilate also rubbed salt in their wound, making them recognize that they were a subjugated people. Even so, he told them to do the judging, which would make them responsible.
- 2) Luke 23:2 probably gives the first concrete accusation: "We found this fellow perverting the nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, declaring himself to be Christ, a king." The part about taxes was a plain lie, but the part about the Christ was true. In any case, Pilate could not safely ignore such accusations, so he interrogated Jesus.
- 3) Matthew 27:11, Mark 15:2, Luke 23:3 and John 18:33-38 all refer to this first interrogation. It revolved around the kingship of Jesus, which could be a crime against Caesar. Jesus affirms that He is a king, but His kingdom "is not of this world" (John 18:36). A kingdom that was not of this world would not represent a threat to Rome. So Pilate went out and said to the crowd, "I find no crime in him at all." If there was no crime, there should be no punishment.
- 4) This led to a barrage of further accusations, to which Jesus did not answer, which surprised Pilate (Matthew 27:12-14, Mark 15:3-5 and Luke 23:5). But among the accusations they mentioned Galilee, which allowed Pilate to learn that Jesus was a Galilean, thereby belonging to Herod's jurisdiction. As 'luck' would have it, Herod was in town and nearby. (He had doubtless been informed about what was afoot, since he also was up and dressed at that early hour.)
- 5) So Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, probably hoping that Herod would take responsibility. Luke is the only one who records this side-trip (23:7-12). But Jesus refused to speak; and what can you do with someone who won't talk? From the Lord's point of view, Herod was irrelevant; it was Pilate who had the authority to crucify. So, frustrated, Herod sent Him back, only now arrayed in a gorgeous robe. The whole side-trip probably took no more than fifteen minutes.
- 6) Poor Pilate, what was he to do? Next he tried the 'releasing a prisoner at Passover' gambit, hoping to release Jesus, but the crowd demanded Barabbas. (Both Matthew and Mark record that Pilate knew that the chief priests had acted out of envy.) In the middle of this proceeding, Pilate received a message from his wife, about her dream (Matthew 27:19) [she had probably been told why he didn't go to bed that night]. When Pilate asked what he should do with Jesus, they demanded that he be crucified. When Pilate asked what evil Jesus had done, they just yelled all the louder. Luke gives us a little further information. Pilate affirmed that neither he nor

- Herod had found guilt in Jesus, but because of their fury he offered to flog Jesus, hoping that would appease them.
- 7) Matthew, Mark and John give some account of the treatment Jesus received from the soldiers. They made a crown of thorns, probably poisonous, and then drove the thorns into His scalp by beating on the crown with a rod. The poison would cause the scalp to swell, and blood would ooze from the wounds. They covered His face with spittle. Although none of the Evangelists mentions it, Isaiah 50:6 was presumably fulfilled as well—a soldier grabbing a fistful of beard and giving a violent yank would tear away the skin holding the hair, which would leave a painful and ugly wound. The total effect must have been horrible, leaving Jesus unrecognizable—Isaiah 52:14 was literally fulfilled. Then Pilate had Him brought out and said, “Look at the man!” (He had repeated that he found no crime in Him.) Pilate was hoping that when the crowd saw how much Jesus had already suffered, they would be satisfied, but it only made them worse!
 - 8) To their “Crucify! Crucify him!” Pilate answered, “You take and crucify him, because I find no crime in him.” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to our law he ought to die, because he made himself ‘Son of God!’” That statement made Pilate more afraid than ever (John 19:6-8). So he took Jesus inside for a second interview. Although Pilate represented the greatest temporal power at that time, Jesus calmly affirmed that there was a higher power, and that He, Jesus, represented that higher power. It appears to me that Pilate at least half believed Him, because John 19:12 says, “From that moment Pilate really tried to release Him.” But the Jews did an ‘end run’.
 - 9) They kept shouting: “If you release this fellow you are no friend of Caesar’s! Whoever makes himself a king is opposing Caesar!” Oops! Pilate owed his position to Caesar’s good graces, and simply could not afford to do something that could be construed (even with a little twisting) as treason. He was beaten and knew it. But he still managed to get them to declare that their only king was Caesar.
 - 10) Sitting on the judgment seat, Pilate called for water, washed his hands in front of the crowd, and said: “I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man. It’s your problem!” So in answer all the people said, “His blood be upon us and upon our children!” (Matthew 27:24-25). Terrible, terrible, terrible! This may well be the worst curse that any parents ever placed upon their descendants. Since Pilate declared Jesus to be righteous, and since the Jews took full responsibility, I suspect that God will not hold Pilate responsible. After all, he was fulfilling the Plan: Jesus had to die by crucifixion.

Before bringing this article to a close, I would like to call attention to several further items that bear on Pilate’s attitude.

- 1) Pilate had Jesus’ ‘crime’ posted in *three* languages; he evidently wanted as wide an audience as possible. All four Gospels mention this, and from them we may understand that the full Accusation was: This is Jesus the Natsorean, the King of the Jews. That Pilate put “**the** Natsorean” (not Natsarene [Nazarene]) indicates that he had researched Jesus. The reference is to Isaiah 11:1; Jesus was David’s Branch, the Messiah. Pilate was making a statement. When the chief priests complained, he answered, “What I have written, I have written!” (John 19:21-22).

- 2) All four Gospels mention the burial, but only Mark registers that when Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for permission to remove Jesus' body, Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead. So he summoned the centurion to confirm the fact (15:44-45). As soon as Jesus died, the centurion most probably had left the scene, going back to headquarters, leaving the four soldiers to guard the two malefactors. Of course Pilate had experienced the three hours of darkness, and had felt the earthquake, but he was not on the scene. He knew that a person on a cross dies from asphyxiation. The weight of the body pushes the diaphragm against the lungs and he can't breathe. Nailing the feet was a sadistic procedure that prolonged the agony—rather than die they would push against the nail to get a breath. Finally, when too weak to do that they would die for lack of air. (That is why they broke the legs of the two thieves; they then died within a few minutes.) Jesus had been on the cross for six hours, but victims could last several times that long. Whether just then or later, Pilate doubtless got a full report from the centurion. Jesus had given a great shout and then died. Obviously, if you are dying without air, you can't shout! The centurion knew that the cross had not killed Jesus. But what mere human can just tell his spirit to leave? $2 + 2 = 4$. Jesus had to be the Son of God.
- 3) Only Matthew mentions the sealing and guarding of the tomb (27:62-66). The chief priests went to Pilate requesting that the tomb be made secure until the third day. To this Pilate replied, "You have a guard; go make it as secure as you can!" His turn of phrase is interesting, "make it as secure as you can". In other words, he was hinting that it would not make any difference. I rather suspect that Pilate believed that Jesus would do what He said.

We learn from Tertullian that Pilate wrote a letter to the emperor suggesting that Jesus be added to the roster of Roman deities. Now to make a suggestion like that involved an element of risk. But evidently Pilate was sufficiently convinced that he took the risk. If I someday meet Pilate in Heaven, I will not be surprised. If his experience with Jesus resulted in his salvation, Pilate would likely suggest a different title for this study: Blessed Pilate—right place, right time!

51) "Projection" *Romans 6:5*

I invite attention to Romans 6:5, that I would now translate like this: "Now since we have become united with Him through the projection of His death, we will certainly be so through that of His resurrection as well." Instead of "through the projection", most versions have 'in the likeness'. Although the word 'likeness' is certainly in the Greek Text, I regret to have to say that my translation (on the market since 2013) omits the word altogether, reading simply 'in His death'. I do not remember why I did that; perhaps it was because I could not make sense of 'likeness'. Just what might 'the likeness of His death' mean, and how does that 'unite' me with Him?

While translating Romans into Portuguese I bumped my nose on this verse again. In order to translate something, you need to decide what it means. 'Likeness' doesn't make any better sense in Portuguese than it does in English. What to do? I decided to analyze the semantic area covered by the term—the semantic area of a word is determined by the sum of the contexts in which it may appropriately be

used. When I am working with the Text, I always ask the Holy Spirit to illumine me as to the intended meaning. In this case, I believe He gave me the word ‘projection’—it remains for others to evaluate whether I was illumined, or not.

Let us analyze the term. The sun projects heat and light, this projecting being a result of something that happens within the sun, its internal combustion. When we are impacted by that heat and light, we share in the result of what happened within the sun. A firearm projects a bullet, so much so that it may be called a projectile. The projection of the bullet is the result of something that happens within the firearm—if you are hit by the bullet, you share in the result. Images that are projected are caused by something that happens within the projector; and so on.

It is only when someone is appropriately impacted by the projection of the results of Christ’s victory on the cross that he becomes united with Him. Now then, being impacted by a projection is one thing; taking advantage of the results that are projected is something else. Although all who live on this planet are impacted by the heat and light that the sun projects, obviously not all make equal use of that heat and light. It is equally obvious that Christians take advantage of the results of Christ’s victory at very different levels.

Consider 2 Peter 1:2-4.

“May grace and peace be multiplied to you through a real knowledge of God and of our Lord Jesus, 3 in that His divine power has granted to us all things *pertaining* to life and godliness, through the real knowledge of the One^a who called us by glory and excellence, 4 through which^b He has granted to us such precious and extraordinary promises, so that through these^c you may become partakers of a divine nature,^d having escaped the depravity that is in the world because of lust.”

Please note verse 3: “His divine power has granted to us all things *pertaining* to life and godliness”. These are things that Christ’s victory projects toward us; it is up to us to take advantage of that bounty. I suppose that few of us would deny that we need help in that direction. That is where the Holy Spirit comes in.

Allow me to give my understanding of the sequence of events involved in receiving new life in Christ:

1) I believe into Jesus. The Text always has ‘believe into’ (εἰς) Jesus or His name, never ‘believe in’ (ἐν). A change of location is involved, from being outside of Christ to being in Him. That change involves commitment.

2) He baptizes me with Holy Spirit. Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8 and Luke 3:16 all have the Baptizer saying that Jesus will baptize people with Holy Spirit. So when and how does Jesus do it? I take it that after Pentecost He does so from His position at the Father’s right hand (1 Peter

^a Again, we only appropriate the complete provision for “life and godliness” to the degree that we grow in our genuine knowledge of God. As Creator He made everything upon which life depends, including life itself, but our understanding of and appreciation for His provision is measured by our relationship with Him.

^b “Which” is plural and presumably refers back to “glory and excellence”.

^c The promises—but of course we have to appropriate them.

^d There is no definite article with “divine nature”; “become” indicates a process—the more like Christ we become, the more divine will our nature be.

3:21-22), and He does it as soon as a person believes into Him. Cornelius offers a concrete example.^a (Please see “Baptisms in the Bible” in the Appendix.)

3) Holy Spirit regenerates me, giving me a new nature.

4) Probably at the same time, He baptizes me into Christ’s body. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 explains that it is the Holy Spirit who baptizes us into Christ: “. . . so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” The primary reference here is probably to the Church as being Christ’s body.^b

5) Then Holy Spirit takes up residence within me, and my body becomes His temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). It is the Holy Spirit within me who helps and enables me to appropriate the benefits that Christ’s victory on the cross projects towards me.

“Now since we have become united with Him through the projection of His death, we will certainly be so through that of His resurrection as well.” I suspect that “united with Him” is supposed to mean more than people tend to think. Just for starters, consider John 14:12: “Most assuredly I say to you, the one believing into me, he too will do the works that I do;^c in fact he will do greater works than these,^d because I am going to my Father.” And then there is Luke 10:19, Ephesians 1:19, Ephesians 3:20, and on, and on.

^a “To **Him** all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes into Him will receive forgiveness of sins.” While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all who were hearing the message (Acts 10:43-44). This was the crucial bit of information they were waiting for, what they had to do to be saved. The minute Peter said, “believe into Jesus”, they did! And the Holy Spirit came upon them!

^b A secondary reference could be to Jesus’ physical body. If we become part of Jesus’ body, then whatever happened to that body happened to us. If that body died, we did. If it was buried, so were we. If it was raised from the dead, we will be too. Correction—we already have new life in Christ, and are to live on that basis.

^c This is a tremendous statement, and not a little disconcerting. Notice that the Lord said, “will do”; not ‘maybe’, ‘perhaps’, ‘if you feel like it’; and certainly not ‘if the doctrine of your church permits it’! If you believe you **will do!** The verb ‘believe’ is in the present tense, 2nd person singular; if you (sg) are believing you will do; it follows that if you are not doing it is because you are not believing. $2 + 2 = 4$. Doing what? “The works that I do.” Well, Jesus preached the Gospel, He taught, He cast out demons, He healed all sorts and sizes of sickness and disease, He raised an occasional dead person, and He performed a variety of miracles (water to wine, walk on water, stop a storm instantaneously, transport a boat several miles instantaneously, multiply food, shrivel a tree—and He implied that the disciples should have stopped the storm and multiplied the food, and He stated that they could shrivel a tree [Peter actually took a few steps on water]). So how about us? The preaching and teaching we can handle, but what about the rest? I once heard the president of a certain Christian college affirm that this verse obviously could not mean what it says because it isn’t happening! Well, in his own experience and in that of his associates I guess it isn’t. But many people today cast out demons and heal, and I personally know someone who has raised a dead person. Miracles are also happening. So how about me? And you?

^d Well now, if we cast out demons, heal and perform miracles, isn’t that enough? Jesus wants more, He wants “greater things” than those just mentioned. Notice again that He said “will do”, not maybe, perhaps, or if your church permits. But what could be ‘greater’ than miracles? This cannot refer to modern technology because in that event such ‘greater things’ would not have been available to the believers during the first 1900 years. Note that the key is in the Lord’s final statement (in verse 12), “because I am going to my Father”. Only if He won could He return to the Father, so He is here declaring His victory before the fact. It is on the basis of that victory that the ‘greater things’ can be performed. Just what are those ‘greater’ things? For my answer, see my outline, “Biblical Spiritual Warfare”, available from my site: www.prunch.org.

52) 'Prophets'***Matthew 2:23***

"And upon arriving he settled in a town called Natsareth [Branch-town], so that what was spoken through the prophets should be fulfilled, that He would be called a Natsorean [Branch-man]."

We know from Luke that Natsareth was Joseph's home—his house and business were waiting for him (although he had been gone for quite a while). The name of the town in Hebrew is based on the consonants נצר (*resh, tsadde, nun*), but since Hebrew is read from right to left, for us the order is reversed = n, ts, r. This word root means 'branch'. Greek has the equivalent for 'ps' and 'ks', but not for 'ts', so the transliteration used a 'dz' (*zeta*), which is the voiced counterpart of 'ts'. But when the Greek was transliterated into English it came out as 'z'. But Hebrew has a 'z', ז (*zayin*), so in transliterating back into Hebrew people assumed the consonants נזר, replacing the correct *tsadde* with *zayin*. This technical information is necessary as background for what follows.

Neither 'Nazareth' nor 'Nazarene', spelled with a *zayin*, is to be found in the Old Testament, but there is a prophetic reference to Messiah as the Branch, *netser*—Isaiah 11:1—and several to the related word, *tsemach*—Isaiah 4:2, Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15; Zechariah 3:8, 6:12. So Matthew is quite right—the prophets (plural, being at least three) referred to Christ as the Branch. Since Jesus was a man, He would be the 'Branch-man', from 'Branch-town'. Which brings us to the word 'natsorean'. The familiar 'Nazarene' (Ναζαρηνοϛ) [Natsarene] occurs in Mark 1:24, 14:67, 16:6 and Luke 4:34, but here in Matthew 2:23 and in fourteen other places, including Acts 22:8 where the glorified Jesus calls Himself that, the word is 'Natsorean' (Ναζωραιοϛ), which is quite different. (Actually, in Acts 22:8 Jesus introduced Himself to Saul as 'the Natsorean', which strict Pharisee Saul would understand as a reference to the Messiah.) I have been given to understand that the Natsareth of Jesus' day had been founded some 100 years before by a Branch family who called it Branch town; they were very much aware of the prophecies about the Branch and fully expected the Messiah to be born from among them—they called themselves Branch-people (Natsoreans). Of course everyone else thought it was a big joke and tended to look down on them. "Can anything good...?"

The difficulty in this case is caused by differing phonologies; the sounds of Hebrew do not match those of Greek, or of English. Since proper names are often just transliterated, as in this case, and a translator will normally follow the phonology of the target language, what happened here was straightforward, without malice. We would have felt no inconvenience had Matthew not appealed to "the prophets". It is the false transliteration going back to Hebrew, from either Greek or English, that creates the seeming difficulty.

53) Pure in Heart***Matthew 5:8***

A pure substance, like honey, is unmixed, it is 100% honey. A pure person is without contamination. A pure heart unites both of these qualities. In 2 Chronicles 16:9 Jehovah looks for people "whose heart is loyal to Him"; it is the pure heart, uncontaminated with other gods.

Consider Psalm 24:3-4 – "Who may ascend into the hill of Jehovah, or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart." The cleanliness of hands spoken of here does not refer to physical dirt, but to moral dirt.

Whoever has clean hands is not practicing sin. "Stand in His holy place" refers to being in the presence of God. Hebrews 12:14 declares that without holiness "no one shall see the Lord". James 4:8 states the matter as an order: "Sinners, cleanse your hands! Double-minded, purify your hearts!" These are the prerequisites for God to draw near to us.

Now then, to actually see God is a devastating experience, but it leads to a higher spiritual level. Consider the case of Job: "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye see you. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). Hearing about it is one thing, seeing it is another! And also that of Isaiah: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of Hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5). Both men, Job and Isaiah, improved spiritually as a result.

Now consider the exhortation in 1 John 3:2-3—"We know that when He is revealed we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is—everyone who has this hope upon him purifies himself, even as He is pure." I take it that 'purifying oneself' means being careful about one's own holiness, to lessen the shock when we meet the Owner face to face.

Is the zeal for purity something we should develop on our own? 2 Timothy 2:22 implies that it is not: "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart". We should look for others who have the same spiritual purpose, to give and receive help and encouragement. Hebrews 3:13 is to the point—"Exhort yourselves every day, while it is called 'today', so that none of you be hardened through sin's deceitfulness."

54) Saved in childbearing

1 Timothy 2:15

In the NKJV, 1 Timothy 2:14-15 reads like this: "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control." We begin with "she will be saved"; 'she' is a pronoun, that stands for a noun, and in the context the reference is clearly to Eve. So how is Eve to be saved? (To render 'preserved' is basically meaningless.) Neither Eve nor any other woman is saved by bearing a child. In the Greek Text we find 'childbirth', a noun, not a verb. Further, there is a definite article with the noun, so it is 'the childbirth'. There is only one childbirth that could result in salvation for Eve, and the rest of us, the birth of the Messiah. Of course Eve bore Seth, thus beginning the line that culminated in the Messiah (Genesis 3:15). In the middle of verse 15, and of the sentence, Paul breaks the rules of grammar and switches from 'she' to 'they'—what is true of Eve is applied to all women. Well, strictly speaking, since 'they' has no antecedent I suppose it could include men as well, everybody (unless someone wants to argue that women are saved on a different basis than men [which I think would run afoul of other passages]). Still, the paragraph is about women. Any sisters in Christ who have been troubled by this verse, thinking that they must bear a child, may relax on that score.

55) 'Size' of faith?***Luke 17:6, Matthew 17:20***

In the NKJV, Luke 17:6 reads like this: "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you." Perhaps because of the parables just discussed, I don't remember ever hearing any other interpretation for this than the size of the faith. (The same holds for Matthew 17:20.) But that usually left me disgruntled: surely my faith was bigger than a seed, but I was never able to make a tree or hill obey me! But looking at the Text again, might the intended meaning of 'as a mustard seed' be different? Is not the phrase ambiguous? Could the verb 'has' be implied? Well then, what kind of 'faith' might a mustard seed have? Albeit so small, it reacts without question to the climactic circumstances, and grows to remarkable proportions. If we reacted similarly, without question, to the Holy Spirit's promptings, our spiritual 'climactic circumstances', we should indeed move mountains, literally. Or to put it another way, a seed has the faith to die, like the Lord Jesus said in John 12:24: "unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone". In 1 Corinthians 15:31 Paul said that he died daily. How so? Obviously he didn't die physically; he died to himself, his own ideas and ambitions, so as to embrace God's will. Dying to self is a prerequisite for moving mountains, because then we will only attempt to do what we see the Father doing (John 5:19).

56) Some related anomalies in Matthew's genealogy of the Christ

Matthew's purpose is to demonstrate that Jesus, the Messiah, has a legal right to sit on David's throne (perhaps answering the Lord's own question in Matthew 22:42). Although there are many kings in the genealogy, David is the only one who is described as 'the king', twice. Since David's throne has to do with the covenant people, and that covenant began with Abraham, the genealogy does as well. It ends with Joseph, Jesus' 'father' by adoption, since Jesus had none of Joseph's genes.^a It was sufficient to Matthew's purpose to show that Joseph was a linear, and legal, descendant of David, the number of intervening generations was beside the point. Matthew's Gospel was directed primarily to a Jewish audience, to whom legal rights were important.

Matthew divides his genealogy of the Christ into three groups of fourteen 'generations'. A comparison of his genealogy with the OT record indicates that it is not a 'normal', straightforward genealogy—there are some anomalies.^b In an effort to understand the purpose behind the anomalies, I will begin with the second group, which may be said to be made up of sovereign kings of Judah. Going back to the OT we discover that there were seventeen such kings, not fourteen. But, Matthew says 'generations', not reigns, and since Ahaziah reigned only one year, Amon only two, and Abijah only three, they can be assimilated into the fourteen generations. That said, however, we next observe that Abijah and Amon are duly included in the list,

^a Indeed He could not, because of the prophecies in Jeremiah 22:30 and 36:30, wherein Jeconiah and Jehoiakim are cursed. However, Jesus received some of David's genes through Mary (please see the note that accompanies Luke 3:23 in my translation).

^b I believe that Matthew composed his Gospel under divine guidance, which leads me to the conclusion that the anomalies were deliberate, on God's part. Therefore, my attempt to unravel the anomalies tries to understand the Holy Spirit's purpose in introducing them into the record.

while Ahaziah is not, followed by Joash and Amaziah. The three excluded names form a group between Jehoram and Uzziah.

Verse eight says that "Joram begot Uzziah", the verb 'begot' being the same one used throughout, but in fact Uzziah was Joram's (Jehoram's) great-great-grandson. So we see that 'begot' refers to a linear descendant, not necessarily a son. We also see that the number 'fourteen' is not being used in a strictly literal sense (whatever the author's purpose may have been). It also appears that 'generation' is not being used in a strictly literal sense. It follows that we are looking at an edited genealogy, edited in accord with the author's purpose.

In an effort to understand why the group of three was excluded, I ask: What might they have in common? They had in common genes from Ahab and Jezebel, as also a direct spiritual and moral influence from them. Ahaziah's mother was Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, so 50% of his genes were from Ahab. 2 Kings 8:27 says that Ahaziah was a son-in-law of the house of Ahab, referring to the mother of Joash, so 75% of his genes were from Ahab. Since Joash married Jehoaddan of Jerusalem, the contamination in Amaziah was down to 37%, and then in Uzziah it was below 20%.^a This is my best guess as to why that group was excluded: a rebuke after the fact. (Matthew is giving an edited genealogy of the Christ, and Ahab's genes were definitely undesirable.)

We come now to another anomaly: $14 \times 3 = 42$, but only 41 names are given; what to do? We begin by noticing that both David and Jeconiah are mentioned on both sides of a 'boundary'. I will consider the second boundary first. Verse eleven says that "Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers", passing over Jehoiakim, Jeconiah's father. But according to the Record, it was Jehoiakim who had "brothers", not Jeconiah. Since we need the real Jeconiah in the third group to make fourteen names, I place Jeconiah in the third group—counting both Jeconiah and Christ we get fourteen names.^b But why was Jehoiakim omitted? So far as I know, he was the only king who had the perversity to actually cut up a scroll with God's Word and then throw it in the fire, Jeremiah 36:23, and the curse that follows in verse 30 is stated to be a consequence of that act. If we count David in the second group, Jehoiakim would make fifteen. But without Jehoiakim we need David in the second group to make fourteen. But that raises another difficulty: we also need David in the first group, to make fourteen. Because of the "brothers", I consider that the 'Jeconiah' before the captivity actually stands for Jehoiakim, whose name is omitted because of his heinous crime in destroying the scroll. In that event, we have fourteen without David, so he can be assigned to the first group.

If the second group is made up of kings, the first group is made up of patriarchs. Acts 2:29 calls David a 'patriarch', so we may not disqualify him on that basis, but of course he is better known as a king—indeed he is expressly called that in the genealogy (the only one who is). Although David may be both patriarch and king, he may not be two people, nor two generations. In consequence, I am decidedly uncomfortable with the proposal that David must be placed in both groups—we should neither split him in two, nor double him. To my mind, he fits better in the second group, but that would leave only thirteen for the first one. Enter Rahab and Ruth (and if four people were omitted from the second group, why could not some

^a It was Dr. Floyd N. Jones who started me thinking along this line (*Chronology of the Old Testament: A Return to the Basics*, Kings Word Press, 1999, pp. 38-42).

^b Of course, if four people were omitted from the second group, some may also have been omitted from the third, but we have no way of knowing, and it would make no difference to the purpose of this genealogy.

also be omitted from the first?). However, I tentatively assign David to the first group, making fourteen. Since David is used as the first boundary, and the purpose of the genealogy is to establish Jesus' right to David's throne, his name is repeated, but I do not count him in the second group.

There were 340 years between the death of Joshua and the birth of David, and Salmon married Rahab while Joshua was still alive, presumably. That sort of oblige Boaz, Obed and Jesse to do their begetting at age 100, or thereabouts (perhaps not impossible, but certainly improbable). But what if 'begot' is being used for a grandson, as we have already seen? (Josiah begot Jeconiah, with no mention of Jehoiakim.) If Athaliah's genes were enough to disqualify Ahaziah, what about Rahab's genes? She was not even an Israelite, and worse, she was a prostitute. Now the Law says some rather severe things about prostitutes.^a "You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog [catamite] to the house of the LORD your God... for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 23:18). For a priest to marry a harlot would profane his posterity (Leviticus 21:13-15), so how about an ancestor of the Messiah? Of course it is possible for a prostitute to be saved, but why was she even mentioned? And why were Tamar, Ruth, and Uriah's wife mentioned? Women were not normally included in genealogies.^b

Now consider Ruth. She was a Moabitess, and according to Deuteronomy 23:3 a Moabite could not enter the assembly of the LORD to the tenth generation. [To me it is an astonishing example of the grace of God that she was included in the Messiah's line.] She embraced Naomi's God, but what about her genes? 'Ten generations' has to do with genes, not spiritual conversion. Moab was a son of Lot, and the first 'Moabite' would be his son, probably a contemporary of Jacob. From Jacob to Salmon we have seven generations, certainly fewer than ten, so Ruth could not enter. Could it be possible that Rahab and Ruth each represent a missing generation? Could that be why they are mentioned?^c If we divide 300 years by five, then the average begetting age would be 60, certainly within the bounds of reason (and if more than two generations were skipped, the number would be further reduced). I repeat that this is not a 'normal' genealogy. Why did Matthew want three 'equal' groups, and why did he choose 'fourteen'? Perhaps for stylistic (symmetry, balance) and mnemonic reasons. However, my concern has been to address any perceived errors of fact, which an inspired Text should not have.

To conclude: Matthew gives us an edited genealogy of the Messiah. If on the one hand it emphasizes the Messiah's grace, on the other it reflects the Messiah's holiness—He cannot overlook sin and its consequences (the four excluded names in the second group are due to that holiness). If the four women were included as a reflection of the Messiah's grace, it is also true that the consequences of sin are not hidden—the fourth is called simply 'Uriah's wife' (not 'widow', even though Solomon was conceived after the murder of Uriah—David did not marry a widow, he stole someone else's wife).

^a However, "the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). This being an edited genealogy of the Messiah, perhaps Rahab, and the other women, were included to emphasize the grace of the Messiah.

^b None of the decent, honest, honorable, responsible mothers are mentioned, only 'exceptions'!

^c Tamar had suffered a severe injustice, and David's sin with Bathsheba was unusually perverse (cowardly murder), but Rahab was probably a victim of circumstances, and Ruth was certainly not to blame for having been born a Moabitess.

57) 'Staff', or 'bed'?***Hebrews 11:21 X Genesis 47:31***

In the NKJV, Hebrews 11:21 reads like this: "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, *leaning* on the top of his staff." It has been alleged that this statement disagrees with Genesis 47:31, that has Jacob leaning on the head of the bed (following the Massoretic Text), rather than the top of his staff. However, close attention to the contexts indicates that Hebrews 11:21 and Genesis 47:31 refer to different occasions, so there is no need to imagine a discrepancy. That said, it may be of interest to note the following. The Hebrew words for 'bed' and 'staff' are spelled with the same three consonants, the difference being in the vowels, that were not written. Thus the Original Hebrew Text was ambiguous here. When the Massorettes added vowel pointing to the Hebrew Text, many centuries after Christ, they chose 'bed'. Long before, the Septuagint had chosen 'staff'.

58) The cursed fig tree***Matthew 21.18-20, Mark 11.12-14, 20-21***

First, I will transcribe the texts:

Matthew 21:18 Now in the early morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. 19 And seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He went up to it and found nothing on it, just leaves. And He says to it, "May you never again produce fruit!" And forthwith the fig tree started to wither. 20 And seeing it the disciples marveled saying, "How quickly the fig tree became withered!"

Mark 11:12 Now the next day, as they were leaving Bethany, He was hungry. 13 And seeing from a distance a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it He found nothing but leaves, because it was not fig season. 14 So Jesus reacted by saying to it, "Let no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening. . . . 20 Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. 21 And Peter, remembering, said to Him: "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has dried up!"

As Mark points out (Mark 11:13), it was not fig season, but a tree with leaves might have some dried figs. Since dried figs are very good eating, any visible figs would have been eaten long since (the tree was near the road). In fact, Jesus was certainly not the first person to come up with this idea, so there was little chance of Him finding any figs. Before commenting on Jesus' reaction, let us clarify what happened to the fig tree.

If we only had Matthew's account, we could understand that everything happened immediately, right there. That is, that the tree dried up immediately before their eyes, causing the disciples to react. But Mark 11:20 makes it clear that the disciples' reaction did not take place until the next morning, 24 hours later. Matthew 21:19 says that after Jesus spoke the fig tree began to wither. Strictly speaking, the Text says that the sap was cut off; the result would not be visible

right away. But as the sap comes from the roots, the tree dried up from the roots, just as Mark 11.20 says! If Peter was the first to speak, the others certainly did too.

Matthew and Mark record what Jesus said differently, but I understand that Jesus actually said both things, one after the other. But how may we understand Jesus' attitude? It was out of season—it was not the tree's fault that it had no figs! Was Jesus unfair for cursing her? Well, to begin, being the Creator, Jesus had the right to do as He pleased with His creation. But it seems to me more likely that it was a prophetic act, the fig tree representing Israel – indeed, the parable of the fig tree in Luke 13:6-9 seems to me to tend in that direction: the owner looked for fruit for three years, without finding any, and since the tree continued without bearing, it was cut down. Third, Jesus took the opportunity to give the disciples a lesson in faith.

59) The 'Legion' and the pigs; where was it?

We need to start with the evidence supplied by the Greek manuscripts. We encounter the episode in three of the Gospels.

Matthew 8:28: γεργησηνων 98% (Gergesenes) AV, NKJV
γαδαρηνων 2% (Gadarenes) NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.

NIV footnote: "Some manuscripts *Gergesenes*; others *Gerasenes*".

Mark 5:1: γαδαρηνων 95.5% (Gadarenes) AV, NKJV
γεργησηνων 4.1% (Gergesenes)
γερησηνων 0.3% (Gerasenes) NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.

NIV footnote: "Some manuscripts *Gadarenes*; other manuscripts *Gergesenes*".

Luke 8:26: γαδαρηνων 97% (Gadarenes) AV, NKJV
γεργησηνων 2% (Gergesenes) TEV
γερησηνων 0.3% (Gerasenes) NIV, NASB, LB, etc.

NIV footnote: "Some manuscripts *Gadarenes*; other manuscripts *Gergesenes*; also in verse 37".

Luke 8:37: γαδαρηνων 96% (Gadarenes) AV, NKJV
γεργησηνων 3.5% (Gergesenes) TEV
γερησηνων 0.3% (Gerasenes) NIV, NASB, LB, etc.

I will begin with Mark. Jesus arrived at "the region [not 'province'] of the Gadarenes". Gadara was the capital city of the Roman province of Perara, located some six miles from the Sea of Galilee. Since Mark was writing for a Roman audience,^a "the region of the Gadarenes" was a perfectly reasonable description of the site. Lamentably, the eclectic Greek text currently in vogue follows about five Greek manuscripts of objectively inferior quality (against at least 1,700 better ones) in reading 'Gerasenes' (to be followed by NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.). The NIV footnote is dishonest: to use 'some' to describe over 1,600 manuscripts against five

^a Although, as explained elsewhere, I understand that Matthew was published first, and Mark probably had a copy open before him as he wrote, yet he deliberately changed Matthew's 'Gergesenes' to 'Gadarenes'—to his intended Roman audience 'Gergesa' would be unknown, while some would indeed know about 'Gadara'.

is a dishonest use of the Queen's English (to use 'others' to refer to some 60 is acceptable).

Luke also has Jesus arriving at "the region of the Gadarenes". Since he was writing for a Greek audience, he follows Mark's example. Again NIV has a dishonest footnote. It is most likely that 'Gerasa' is a fiction, a 'place' that never existed. On the other hand, 'Gergesa' certainly did exist, although we no longer know the exact location. As I will explain while discussing Matthew, below, I have no doubt that it was a village near the spot where Jesus landed.

Matthew clearly wrote 'Gergesenes' rather than 'Gadarenes'. Since he was writing for a Jewish audience, and many Galileans would be quite familiar with the Sea of Galilee, he provided a more localized description. Further, try to picture the events in your mind. Do you suppose that the swineherds ran six miles to Gadara? The populace would certainly not run the six miles back. All of that would have taken entirely too long. To me it is obvious that there was a village close by, probably within half a mile, called 'Gergesa'. It was to that village that the swineherds ran, told their story, and brought the residents back. Galileans familiar with the Sea of Galilee would certainly recognize 'Gergesa'.

Not only does Matthew name a different place, he affirms that there were really two demonized men, whereas Mark and Luke mention only one. As a former tax collector, numerical precision was important to Matthew. Neither Mark nor Luke use the number 'one'; they merely commented on the more prominent of the two, the one who wanted to go with Jesus. I understand that indeed there were two of them.

60) The Mercy Seat

The Ark of the Testimony was a box made of acacia wood, overlaid with pure gold, in and out. It was about 45 inches long, 27 inches wide and 27 inches high. That box had a lid, of the same length and width, made of pure gold. That lid is generally called the mercy seat;^a at each end there was a cherub looking in, also of pure gold, of one piece with the lid.^b That lid was the place where propitiation was effected, the place where God's holiness, justice, love and mercy met together to deal with man's sin. But at first God said to Moses, "there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the testimony" (Exodus 25:22). Apparently this was a privilege that only Moses had, because after that only the high priest could go into the Most Holy Place, and even so, only once a year. The entire chapter 16 of Leviticus spells out the required procedure, whose purpose was to make atonement for all the sins of the people. The detailed procedure emphasized the difficulty surrounding a propitiating of God's outraged character, outraged by man's sin. Access to the mercy seat was protected by several barriers, the final one being the heavy curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Anyone who attempted to enter in an unauthorized manner died on the spot.

Those rules were not changed until the Lamb of God achieved the ultimate propitiation—it took an infinite Being to pay an infinite price. God Himself tore that curtain in two, top to bottom, symbolizing in a dramatic way that access to

^a The KJV called the lid the 'mercy seat', and that designation continues in general use. The term 'propitiatory', used as a noun, would perhaps be more precise.

^b See Exodus 25:10-21.

God was now potentially available to all. But there is more to the story than that, as Hebrews makes clear. “Without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22). This statement points back to Leviticus 17:11, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul”. Note that for blood to be on the altar it has to be shed—someone, or something, has to die. Recall that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). In the beginning, the blood of animals was used, but that was only a temporary, stopgap, measure, “because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). So where does that leave us?

For an Eternal Being, time is irrelevant, because He knows the end from the beginning.^a For God Himself to set up and decree a stopgap procedure, He must have had a permanent solution waiting for the appointed time. Indeed, this is expressly stated in 1 Peter 1:18-21: “you were redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, as of a faultless and pure lamb; 20 who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world,^b but was revealed in these last times for your sake.” The Lamb of God was the permanent solution. But that permanent solution was not tied to the Ark of the Testimony, with its mercy seat, that was prepared by Moses.^c God told Moses repeatedly to be sure to make everything “according to the pattern” that he had received on the mountain (Exodus 25:40). And why was God so insistent? Because that tabernacle with its furnishings was a “copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5).^d This would appear to mean that there is a ‘mercy seat’ in Heaven! Is this not clearly implied by Hebrews 9:11-12? “Christ entered once for all into the real Holy Places, having obtained eternal redemption— He had come as High Priest of the good things that are about to be, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, 12 and with His own blood, not that of goats and calves.” ‘Holy Places’ being plural, the phrase must include the Most Holy Place, which contains but one piece of furniture, whose principal component is the mercy seat. Christ entered the heavenly Most Holy Place, as eternal high priest, carrying His own blood. And what did He do with that blood? He applied it to the heavenly mercy seat, “having obtained eternal redemption”, “so that those who have been called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:15).

But even that is not the whole story. The shed blood of God’s Lamb also served for something else; it served to purify the heavenly things (Hebrews 9:23)! But how could anything in Heaven need purifying? Well, is Satan not a contamination,

^a As the glorified Jesus said in Revelation 22:13, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, beginning and end, the First and the Last”. How could He know that He was the ‘end’ and the ‘last’, if He had not been there? I suspect that time and space may be limited to our solar system, being especially relevant to our planet, as the home of the human race. Without time and space it is impossible to measure the universe.

^b This sort of ‘blows my mind’—the Text is saying that the Lamb, with blood shed, was so known before the creation of our race and planet; which means that the Creator knew, before creating, what would happen and the terrible redemption price He Himself would have to pay, yet He went ahead anyway. Wow!

^c In passing, remember that the ‘box’ contained three items: 1) the stone tablets, 2) the gold pot full of manna and 3) Aaron’s rod that budded—all were covered by the ‘lid’, the mercy seat. Have you ever considered the significance of those three items? Allow me to suggest the following possibility: 1) the stone tablets represent God’s written Revelation to mankind, and its purpose is to orient our conduct; 2) the manna represents God’s provision for our physical needs; 3) Aaron’s rod represents God’s authentication of His plan of salvation, or redemption—His provision for our spiritual need. All three ultimately depend upon the definitive propitiation provided by God’s Lamb.

^d Revelation 15:5 refers to “the sanctuary of the Tabernacle of the testimony in the heaven”.

everywhere he goes? Job 1:6 and 2:1 state plainly that Satan presented himself before the LORD in Heaven, along with other high-ranking angels. If I understand Revelation 12:7-12 correctly, Satan still has access to God's throne:

War was declared in heaven; Michael and his angels were to wage war with the dragon; so the dragon and his angels made war,^a 8 but he was not strong enough; neither was there any place found for him in heaven any more. 9 So the great dragon was expelled, that ancient serpent, who is called Slanderer and Satan, who deceives the whole inhabited world; he was thrown into the earth,^b and his angels were expelled with him. 10 And I heard a loud voice in the heaven saying: "Now the salvation and the power have come,^c even the Kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ, because the accuser of our brothers^d has been thrown down, who accused them before our God day and night. 11 And they conquered^e him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not cherish their lives, *even* up to death. 12 Therefore rejoice, O heavens, yes, you who are dwelling in them!^f Woe to the earth and the sea! Because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has little time."

Once Satan is expelled from Heaven, the final cleansing will take place. According to our timeframe, the Lamb's propitiation has already occurred, while the expelling of Satan is still in the future. But to an Eternal Being our timeframe is irrelevant. The heavenly things have been cleansed.

The eternal mercy seat, with the infinite propitiation, resides in the heavenly Tabernacle. It is there that God's holiness, justice, love and mercy met together^g and formulated the definitive solution to man's sin, and all other consequences of Lucifer's rebellion. It is that mercy seat that guarantees the Plan of Redemption, with all its ramifications. Oh praise our God! Surely a doxology is in order.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost!

How many sermons have you heard, or preached, on the subject of the heavenly mercy seat, or even the earthly one? I would suggest for your consideration that this has been a serious omission. The mercy seat should be at

^a The dragon knew that Michael had received the order, so he decided to get in the first blow.

^b "Into the earth", including its atmosphere. The idea seems to be that at this point Satan is confined to this planet. From the content of the following verses, I take it that Satan's expulsion occurs in the middle of the seven-year period. So he is still in heaven accusing us (accusing us of what? There would be no point in bringing false accusations, so we must be providing Satan with 'ammunition'—not a nice thought!).

^c Wait a minute! If it is only "Now", where have the Kingdom and Authority been in the meantime? As long as a government is being challenged, its rule is not complete or tranquil. I find it instructive that Satan still has sufficient power to wage war, in Heaven!

^d "Our brothers"—I wonder who is speaking, since the 'brothers' are saved by the blood of the lamb.

^e That is what the Text says. Comparing 6:11 and 7:13 (Revelation), perhaps it is necessary for a certain number of God's servants to be willing to die for the Cause to bring about the accuser's expulsion.

^f It is the inhabitants that do the rejoicing, not the place.

^g God's holiness alone could not resolve the problem, nor His justice alone, nor His love alone, nor His mercy alone—it took all four, working together.

the center of any and every exposition of God's Plan of Redemption. Perhaps then people would not be so careless about their relationship with the Sovereign Creator!

61) The Natsorean

Every version that I remember seeing miss-leads the reader by obliterating one of the Lord's titles, a title that the glorified Jesus Himself used when dealing with Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road. When Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?", He answered, "I am Jesus the Natsorean, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 22:8). Most versions at this place render 'Jesus of Nazareth', while some have 'Jesus the Nazarene'. For an explanation of why I use 'ts' instead of 'z', please see my article, "'Prophets' in Matthew 3:23" (prunch.org).

The familiar 'Nazarene' [Ναζαρηνοϛ] occurs four times: Mark 1:24, 14:67, 16:6 and Luke 4:34. 'Jesus the Nazarene' would appear to be another way of saying 'Jesus off/from Nazareth', and some versions so translate the phrase. Unfortunately, the versions do the same with 'Natsorean' [Ναζωραιοϛ], which I consider to be a serious error. Just looking at the two Greek words, they are obviously different. The Hebrew root is *netser*; 'branch', a reference to Isaiah 11.1 ('Nazareth' is a transliteration of the Hebrew name). Going back to Acts 22:8, why would Jesus waste time with the name of a town? He was dealing with a highly instructed Pharisee; He introduced Himself as David's Branch, the Messiah—a reference that Saul would immediately understand.

'Natsorean' occurs fifteen times: Matthew 2:23, 26:71; Mark 10:47; Luke 18:37, 24:19; John 18:5,7, 19:19; Acts 2:22, 3:6, 4:10, 6:14, 22:8, 24:5 and 26:9. All have the definite article, except the first one—the Natsorean; except that in Acts 24:5 Felix speaks of 'the sect of the Natsoreans'. Speaking of Felix, his use of the term 'sect' is instructive. Aside from Acts 22:8, that I have already discussed, I consider that John 19:19 deserves special comment. The title above the cross read: This is Jesus the Natsorean, the King of the Jews. Pilate had evidently researched Jesus quite well (anyone with a large following is a potential problem); I believe that he knew precisely what he was doing when he used 'Natsorean', just as he knew precisely what he was doing when he put 'the King of the Jews'. For more on the subject of Pilate, please see my article: "Poor Pilate—wrong place, wrong time" (prunch.org).

Whatever version of the Bible you are using, I would urge you to correct it at the references mentioned above, so you know when a title is being used. 'The Natsorean' needs to be added to any list of the Lord's titles.

62) The 'smallest' seed?

Mark 4:31-32, Matthew 13:32

In the NKJV, Mark 4:31-32 reads like this: "It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade."

The rendering 'the smallest seed in the world/earth' is unfortunate and misleading. The Text has 'of those on the ground', repeating the phrase above it, only eliding the verb. The Lord was not making a global botanical statement, as the next verse makes clear—He was referring to vegetables planted in a garden in His day and in that area, and of such herbs mustard had the smallest seed. To object that

tobacco and orchid seeds are smaller is beside the point. My translation reads like this: “It is like a mustard seed, that when it is sown on the ground is the smallest of all such seeds, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden herbs and produces big branches, so that the birds of the air are able to rest in its shade.” The verb I have rendered ‘to rest’ is a compound form. The noun root refers to a temporary shelter, like a tent or a hut. The verbal form means to make use of such a shelter. Here the preposition *kata* is prefixed to the verb, emphasizing, as I suppose, the temporariness. The Text says that the birds can use the shade, not the branches. But shade moves with the sun, and with the wind—how can you build a nest in something that keeps moving around (the Text actually says ‘under its shade’)? My comments also serve for Matthew 13:32, except that there the birds are resting in the ‘branches’, rather than the shade. The verb is the same, and I handle it the same way, ‘rest’ rather than ‘nest’, although ‘nest’ is possible.

63) The theory of evolution

All genuine science is based on the principle of cause and effect—we observe an effect and try to isolate the cause; and it is logically impossible for a cause to produce an effect larger or more complex than itself. Any human being who is both honest and intelligent, when confronted with the observable universe with its incredible organization and complexity, is obliged to conclude that there must be a CAUSE, a Cause with intelligence and power beyond our understanding—to refuse to do so is to be perverse. Since we have personality, He must also.

The only alternative to a Cause would be chance working with nothing. But it is stupidly, ridiculously impossible that chance, working with nothing, could produce anything. $10 \times 0 = 0$, $1,000 \times 0 = 0$, $1,000,000 \times 0 = 0$, and so on; no matter how many times you multiply zero, the result is always zero. If you multiply zero by something every day during five billion (or trillion) years, the result will always be zero. That chance plus nothing produced the universe is stupidly, ridiculously impossible. Even if one starts with the superstition of a ‘big bang’ of inorganic (without life) material, where did life come from. [I bypass the question of where all that inorganic material came from.]

The science of physics tells us that the inorganic [no life] known universe can be described with up to 350 information ‘bits’; but it takes 1,500 information ‘bits’ to describe the smallest protein—it is so small that it cannot live by itself, but it is part of a living system. So how could evolution produce life? Where could chance find 1,150 ‘bits’ of new information, if in the whole universe there were only 350? Not only that, the ‘e-coli’ bacteria takes about seven million ‘bits’, and one human cell takes around twenty billion ‘bits’! The theory of evolution, to explain the origin of life, is stupidly, ridiculously impossible!!

The science of genetics, with its genome projects, has discovered that a random change of only three nucleotides is fatal to the organism. Consider the chimpanzee, presumably man’s ‘nearest relative’: the genetic difference is said to be about 1.6%. That may not sound like much, but it is around 48 million nucleotide differences, and a random change of only three nucleotides is fatal to the animal—it follows that it is simply impossible for a chimp to evolve until it becomes a man (some 15 million chimps would perish in the attempt, never getting beyond the first three nucleotides!). Each different type of animal had to be created separately, just as Genesis affirms. Any evolutionary hypothesis, to explain the different types of

animals (not to mention birds, insects, fish, plants, etc.) is scientifically impossible, stupidly, ridiculously impossible.

The so-called 'geologic column' is a fiction. In Australia there are fossilized tree trunks, upright, passing through various layers of sedimentary rock, that according to the 'geologic column' represent many millions of years—stupidly, ridiculously impossible! In the U.S. there is a high plateau (mesa) with a layer of older rock on top of a layer of newer rock (according to the 'column'), but the area involved is so extensive that no known force would be able to overcome the friction caused by an attempt to have one layer slide over the other layer (the argument that is used)—this also is impossible for the 'geologic column'.

Some 60 miles southwest of Dallas, Texas, there is a town called Glen Rose, that is close to the Paluxy River. The Dinosaur Valley State Park is located there, because the river bed has tracks of two types of dinosaur: three-toed and four-toed. Upriver from the park a paleontologist named Dr. Carl Baugh bought a significant amount of land on both sides of the river, so he could do his own excavations. On his property he has a museum that I myself have visited. In the **same layer** of sedimentary rock he encountered the following: two trilobite fossils, that evolutionists say existed 550 million years ago; a fossilized moss called 'lapidodendron', that evolutionists say existed 250 million years ago; a complete fossil of a dinosaur called 'acrocantaurus' (40 feet long), that evolutionists say existed 100 million years ago; seven tracks of a huge 'cat', that evolutionists say existed 6 million years ago; 57 human footprints (some being inside a dinosaur track); the fourth finger of a woman's left hand, fossilized; and even a pre-deluvian iron hammer (its iron does not rust, being 96.6% iron and 2.7% chlorine)—**all of that in the very same layer of sedimentary rock!**

It follows that a geologic column does not exist; it is a perverse invention perpetrated by dishonest and perverse persons. All those fossils were produced by Noah's Flood, about 4,365 years ago; otherwise, how can you explain that all those things are in the very same layer of rock? (We may note in passing that it is common for defenders of the 'geologic column' to argue in a circle: the age of a rock layer is determined by the fossils it contains, while the age of a fossil is determined by the rock layer where it is found!)

Furthermore, the earth is young. In the royal observatory in England they have been measuring the force of the magnetic field that surrounds the earth each year since 1839. They have found that the magnetic force is diminishing at a constant rate, or geometric progression: plotting the yearly values on a graph, they form a cline. This means that it is possible to project the line in both directions. If we project the line to a point 10,000 years ago, the magnetic force would be so strong that it would crush all life on the planet. It follows that any theory that requires millions, or billions of years is stupidly, ridiculously impossible.

The Mississippi river dumps 80,000 tons of sediment into the gulf of Mexico every hour! All you have to do is measure the delta to see that the earth is young. The diameter of the sun is diminishing at the rate of about 40 inches every hour. Projecting backwards for 100,000 years the sun would be twice its present size—it would fry everything on the earth's surface; there would be no life. Evolutionists say that granite took 300 million years to crystalize, but within granite there are polonium 'haloes' with half-lives of minutes, or even seconds. Granite had to be created instantaneously. Symbiotic plants and insects had to be created at the same time, and require 24-hour days. And so on.

In short, the evolutionary hypothesis of origins is scientifically impossible; stupidly, ridiculously impossible. A number of decades ago the scholar Sir

Frederick Hoyle was contracted to evaluate the scientific probability that life could have appeared on the planet by chance (he had unlimited funding and free access to libraries). He arrived at the following conclusion: it would be easier for a whirlwind to pass through a junk yard and a perfect Boeing 747 come flying out of the other side than for life to have appeared on our planet by chance. Well, well, well, that life could have originated by an evolutionary process is obviously, stupidly, ridiculously impossible. [By the way, any questions about the morality of the Creator have nothing to do with science.]

64) The wedding in Cana

John:1-11

In John 1:43 Jesus decided to leave for Galilee, since He was in Judea, on the east side of the Jordan River, more or less opposite Jericho, probably. In 2:13 Jesus returned to Judea, but to Jerusalem, because of the Passover. The interval would have been two or three weeks. Well, each 'leg' of the trip must have been at least 130 km, on foot, which allows us to deduce that the reason for the trip was of some importance.

“On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee” (2:1). The third day counting from when? 1:19-28 happened on one day; 1:29-34 happened the next day (2nd); 1:35-42 happened the following day (3rd); 1:43-51 happened the day after that (4th). So the third day here should be counted from the last day mentioned (1:43-51), although it may be included (which is likely, in Jewish thought). The wedding feast began that day, but such feasts often lasted for several days. Jesus and His disciples (four?) had a walk of about 130 km (probably): 90 up the Jordan Valley (relatively flat and straight) and 40 through more rugged terrain. Since everyone made their journeys on foot, and therefore were used to it, they could easily complete the journey in two days. Therefore, they would have arrived there by the end of the first day of the party (if not earlier).

Jesus' family lived in Natsareth, which was perhaps 30 km from Cana, in a straight line, but the terrain was rugged. The entire family was at the wedding (2:12), but the lack of any mention of Joseph permits us to understand that he was already dead. Therefore, as the eldest son, Jesus was the head of the family. Mary was in a position to give orders to the employees (2:5). Adding it all up, I come to the conclusion that the bride was one of Jesus' half-sisters,^a which would give the mother, Mary, the authority to give instructions; it would also explain her concern about the lack of wine. It would also explain what prompted Jesus to undertake such a journey, only to return with little delay.

A wedding feast would usually last several days. The supply of food and drink would not run out until near the end, in the event. If Mary was the bride's mother, we can understand her concern about the lack of wine, since it would be a disgrace to the family. But why appeal to Jesus, even though He was the head of the family? What could He do? It seems to me that she was asking for a miracle, at least judging by the order she gave to the employees; in fact, it would be the only possible solution. Jesus' answer, that it was not yet time, goes in the same direction. But why, then, did He choose to act anyway? I do not know, the Text does not say; but

^a In Matthew 13:54-56 the inhabitants of Natsareth name Mary as the mother of Jesus; James, Joseph, Simon and Judas as His brothers (half-brothers); and they spoke of “all their sisters” (half-sisters). The use of 'all' suggests more than two, and the married woman in Cana would no longer be there. After Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary had a normal family.

I offer the following suggestion: Jesus well knew that the function of being His mother brought humiliation to Mary, because the gossips would not forgive the fact that she had married already pregnant (and even though Joseph had assumed him as a son, the physical aspect of Jesus didn't match)^a—Jesus understood that he owed her a special consideration. Besides, Jesus owed the family a great deal, and it would be up to Him to avoid embarrassing her, if possible.

The fact is that Jesus acted and produced around 600 liters of wine—600 liters of wine! Well, if there were 100 people at the feast, that would make six liters per person! Who would drink six liters (near the end of the feast)? And the wine was of outstanding quality. My conclusion is that Jesus gave the new couple a nice gift — most of the wine would be left over, and could be sold later. Because it was very good, the wine would bring a good price. I find it curious that the first miraculous sign was not a healing one, but a domestic one. He 'saved the feast', saving the family from a disgrace, and He made a significant contribution to the new couple's happiness—to them, at least, Jesus would always be remembered as a benefactor.

65) 'This is', or 'you are'?

Matthew 3:17 X Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22

In the NKJV, Matthew 3:17 reads like this: “And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’.” And Mark 1:11 reads like this: “Then a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’.” Luke also has “You are”. So what did the Voice actually say? In a manner similar to what happened on the Day of Pentecost, I conclude that each hearer received his own interpretation, or message. Matthew records the event from John's perspective: he heard, “This is...” Mark and Luke record the event from Jesus' perspective: He heard, “You are...” At Pentecost, with over a dozen languages being spoken at once, even if one of them was yours, it would require a personal miracle in your ear to enable you to extract your message from the welter of sound.

66) 'Valley', or ravine'?

Luke 3:5

In the NKJV, Luke 3:4-5 reads like this: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth...’” Does this mean that the surface of the earth will be flattened out? My translation reads like this: “A voice calling out: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness, make His paths straight. 5 Every ravine will be filled up, and every mountain and hill will be leveled; the crooked parts of the roads will be straightened out, and the rough parts will be smoothed out;...’” The reference is to Isaiah 40:3. Hebrew poetry, and prose, makes heavy use of parallel or synonymous statements. From the context in Isaiah it seems clear that “in the wilderness” goes with the verb “make straight”, not “call out”. But why a straight road in the wilderness? Any road facilitates the movement of people and goods, but a straight road through accidented terrain is a major asset, and

^a John 8:41 is inserted in the midst of a heated argument between Jesus and the Pharisees. They had researched everything about Jesus thoroughly. They knew that Jesus was born six months after Joseph and Mary's marriage, and was born normal size. Two plus two equals four.

Jerusalem is surrounded by accidented terrain. I render ‘ravine’ according to the normal meaning of the Greek word here; ‘ravine’ is also one of the normal meanings of the corresponding Hebrew word in Isaiah. Actually, Isaiah 40:3-4 describes the construction of a modern super highway. Verse 5 describes what happens where the highway passes, not all over the place.

67) When did Jesus leave Annas?

John 18:24

After Jesus was taken prisoner in the Garden, only John mentions that He was taken first to Annas; all the others only mention His being taken to Caiaphas, where the recorded proceedings took place, although of the three only Matthew actually names him (Matthew 26:57, Mark 14:53, Luke 22:54).

So far, so good, but the difficulty begins with John 18:15, that takes up Peter’s denials without further ado; but Peter’s denials took place at Caiaphas’ house, not Annas’. Then verses 19-23 have the high priest questioning Jesus, still at Caiaphas’. Then comes verse 24: NKJV reads, “Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest”; NIV reads, “Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest” (but a footnote offers, “Now Annas had sent him”); TEV reads, “So Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the High Priest”; while NASB reads, “Annas therefore sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest”. All four of these versions have John 18:15-23 occurring in Annas’ house, rather than that of Caiaphas—the NIV footnote points to the correct rendering.

It would appear that all four of the versions follow the so-called ‘critical’ (read ‘eclectic’) text, that follows some 9% of the Greek manuscripts in adding a conjunction, ‘then’ or ‘therefore’ (οὐ), after the initial verb, thereby creating the ‘problem’. Following the 90%, including the best line of transmission, I render, “(Annas had sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.)”. The use of parenthetical comments, or historical/cultural asides, is standard procedure for John; for a partial list see: 1:44, 2:6, 4:2,9,44, 6:4,64, 7:50, 9:14, 11:2,18-19,30-31, 12:1,6,16, 13:2,11,28-29 (there are at least a dozen more). I take it that verse 24 here is just one more instance; it is as if at this point John realizes that the reader could think that the proceedings were still going on at Annas’ house. 8:25 resumes with Peter’s denials. Following the correct Text, and the correct understanding thereof, John’s record is not at variance with that of the other three Gospels.

68) When is an apostle?

The beginning

The basic meaning of the term is ‘sent one’; in John 13:16 it is used in that way. But within the incipient Christian Church it came to have a specialized meaning: an office or function characterized by special spiritual authority. It began with the twelve disciples who were personally chosen by Jesus; after His resurrection they received the designation, ‘apostles’ (but the Iscariot had lost his place, leaving eleven). With the exception of four verses (Luke 11:49, John 13:16, Acts 14:4 and 14) I would say that all the occurrences of the term in the four Gospels and Acts, about thirty-five, refer to that group, as do Galatians 1:17, 19; 2 Peter 3:2; Jude 17 and Revelation 21:14. The purpose of this note is to enquire whether the NT signals any further uses of the term.

Acts 1:13-26 records Peter’s initiative to replace the Iscariot. The Text does not say that it was God’s idea; and when they asked God to choose between the two

candidates, they did not give Him the option of saying “neither”. The Text affirms that Matthias was numbered with the Eleven apostles, but he receives no further mention.

Paul (erstwhile Saul of Tarsus) repeatedly refers to himself as an apostle: Romans 1:1, 11:13, 1 Corinthians 1:1, 9:1, 2, 15:9, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:6, 1 Timothy 1:1, 2:7, 2 Timothy 1:1, 11 and Titus 1:1. Luke refers to Paul as an apostle in Acts 14:4 and 14. Jesus personally chose Paul, returning from Heaven to do so. Aside from the Eleven, Paul was the only one personally designated by Jesus.

Jesus Himself is called “the Apostle” of our confession in Hebrews 3:1. Peter calls himself an apostle in 1 Peter 1:1 and 2 Peter 1:1, but of course he is one of the Twelve. James, the half-brother of Jesus, became the ‘big boss’ in Jerusalem, and evidently was regarded as an apostle—1 Corinthians 15:7 and Galatians 1:19. Luke refers to Barnabas as an apostle: Acts 14:4 and 14. Paul seems to refer to Silvanus and Timothy as apostles: 1 Thessalonians 2:6. It is possible to interpret Romans 16:7 in the same way with reference to Andronicus and Junias. I believe those are the only ones who are actually named.

The discussion up to this point was necessary to provide the background for the questions that are the occasion for this study: did ‘apostle’ become an established office or function for the ongoing life of the Church, until the return of Christ, and if so, how is an apostle to be designated or recognized? It is my intention to analyze every verse where the term is used, and I will begin with those that may be purely historical, going on from those already dealt with.

In 2 Corinthians 11:5 and 12:11 Paul compares himself to ‘the most eminent apostles’, which must be limited to his contemporaries. 1 Corinthians 9:5 also must be limited to his contemporaries. 1 Corinthians 15:5 and 7 refer to physical appearances of the resurrected Jesus before His ascension (of necessity historical). 1 Corinthians 4:9 is a little different: “I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men” (read also verses 10-13). In the context, Paul is complaining about the way he has been treated by some in Corinth, but in this verse he seems actually to be blaming God for the way he has been treated! I suppose that the use of the word ‘last’ would be a comparison with God’s servants in prior ages. Paul is not talking about the future of the Church in this passage, and if we only had this text on the subject, we would have to conclude that to be an apostle was not a good thing.

And now we come to Luke 11:49-51, a most interesting text. “Therefore the wisdom of God also said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,’ that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.” Jesus is speaking, deriding the lawyers. His citation of “the wisdom of God” appears to have no match in the OT, so what was His meaning? In 1 Corinthians 1:24 Paul refers to Christ as ‘the wisdom of God’. In Matthew 23:34 Jesus said, “I send you prophets”, so here Jesus may be referring to Himself as ‘the wisdom of God’. However that may be, if the “required of this generation” was fulfilled in 70 AD, as I suppose, then the ‘apostles’ here are also historical.

I will now consider the other places where the phrase ‘prophets and apostles’ occurs, albeit with the terms in reverse order: Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5, and Revelation 18:20.

Ephesians 2:19-22—"So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone; 21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are being built together to become a habitation of God in spirit." The truth that Paul is expounding is that in Christ Gentiles join Jews as "fellow citizens" and "members of God's household", part of "the whole building". In what sense can that "building" be built upon "the foundation of the apostles and prophets"? Presumably "prophets" is short for the writings that make up the Old Testament Scriptures, or Canon. **The Faith is based on revealed Truth, not individual people.** Analogously, presumably "apostles" is short for the writings that make up the New Testament Scriptures, or Canon. Again, the Faith is based on revealed Truth, not individual people. Our "growing into a holy temple" (verse 21) depends upon the Holy Spirit and His Sword (not individuals whom God used). Note that Paul mentions the 'apostles' first. In any case, the 'apostles' here are historical.

Ephesians 3:1-7—"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—2 surely you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God that was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the 'secret'^a (as I have written briefly already, 4 with reference to which, when you read, you can understand my insight into Christ's secret), 5 which in different generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by Spirit^b to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles are joint-heirs, of the same body, and fellow partakers of His promise in the Christ through the Gospel, 7 of which I became a servant according to the gift of God's grace, the gift given to me according to the outworking of His power." The use of "now" in verse 5 indicates that Paul is referring to the NT Canon. An apostle, upon receiving a revelation, would also function as a prophet, but people like Mark and Luke were prophets without being apostles. I take the 'apostles' here to be historical.

Revelation 18:20—"Rejoice over her, O heaven, yes you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced your judgment against her!"^c Perhaps this verse should be connected to 18:6-7, and in that event the judgment was pronounced in faith. But just who are these apostles? I take it that "saints and apostles and prophets" is in apposition to "heaven", and in that event, whoever they are, they are already in heaven. It follows that this text is irrelevant to the occasion for this study.

The hinge

As a hinge to link the past to the present, I will now consider the two texts that refer to 'false apostles'; they are 2 Corinthians 11:13 and Revelation 2:2.

2 Corinthians 11:12-15—"Further, I will keep on doing what I do in order to cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things of which they boast. 13 Such men are really false apostles,

^a I consider that 'secret' is a better rendering than 'mystery'. The truth about the Church is not all that mysterious; it just had not been explained before.

^b There being no article with 'spirit', it could be either 'by Spirit' (used as a proper name) or 'in spirit' (referring to the manner). Both are true and legitimate, but I have chosen the first option in the translation.

^c Instead of "saints and apostles", a small minority of the Greek manuscripts has 'holy apostles', as in AV and NKJV.

deceitful workers, transforming themselves into ‘apostles’ of Christ.^a 14 And no wonder, because Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 So it is no great thing if his servants also masquerade as ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” It is well to remember that neither Satan nor his servants are in the habit of appearing with horns and tails. Just because someone ‘looks good’ does not mean that he is. We need spiritual discernment at all times. Note that Paul affirms that such people are Satan’s servants, and they evidently declared themselves to be ‘apostles’. In our day we have a veritable plague of self-proclaimed ‘apostles’ (that I call ‘apustles’); now whom do you suppose they are serving?

Going back to the title of this study, when is an apostle? In Galatians 1:1 Paul affirms that his apostleship was “not from men nor through a man”, but through both the Father and the Son. Paul’s apostleship did not depend upon human ordination or recognition. So what about apostleship today? In Romans 1:1 Paul says he is a “called apostle”. I take the point to be that true apostles are not ordained by man; they are designated by God, who has a specific reason for doing so.^b In the case of Paul, it was “to promote obedience of faith among all ethnic nations” (verse 5). Any genuine apostle will have a specific task to fulfil. Although God does not take back His gifts (Romans 11:29), a gift may be ignored (because the church’s doctrine does not allow it), or neglected (1 Timothy 4:14), and hence aborted. Far worse, even an apostle that Jesus chose personally can be ‘rejected’ (1 Corinthians 9:27). If Paul recognized the possibility for himself, how about all the ‘apustles’ in our day?

In Revelation 2:2 the glorified Christ is writing to the church in Ephesus: “I know your works, yes the labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot stand those who are evil. And you have tested those who claim to be apostles and are not, and found them *to be* liars.” The glorified Christ Himself declares that there are false apostles (and this at the close of the first century), and that the church in Ephesus knew how to test them.^c Unfortunately, at least from my point of view, we are not told how they did it, the criteria that they used. There is one text that speaks of the ‘signs of an apostle’, 2 Corinthians 12:12. “Truly the apostolic signs were produced among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”

Both Stephen and Phillip, ‘mere’ deacons, performed miracles, but evidently that did not transform them into apostles. And then there are the words of Sovereign Jesus Himself in John 14:12. “Most assuredly I say to you,^d the one

^a There have always been those who want to ‘get on the band-wagon’, to get a free ride; who traffic in spiritual things for personal, temporal advantage. Since such people only do damage, Paul’s desire to expose them stems from his concern for the Corinthians’ welfare.

^b It follows that there is no ‘apostolic succession’, since an apostle is not ‘ordained’ by men. There is only ‘discipolic’ succession.

^c Is there not an implication here that there were also genuine apostles? If there were no such thing as an apostle, there could be no candidates, and hence no need for criteria. When John wrote this he was the last survivor of the Twelve (also Paul), and he himself would soon die.

^d “Most assuredly” is actually “amen, amen”—rendered “verily, verily” in the AV. Only John registers the word as repeated, in the other Gospels it is just “amen”. In the contemporary literature we have no example of anyone else using the word in this way. It seems that Jesus coined His own use, and the point seems to be to call attention to an important pronouncement: “Stop and listen!” Often it precedes a formal statement of doctrine or policy, as here.

believing into me, he too will do the works that I do; in fact he will do greater works than these,^a because I am going to my Father.”

This is a tremendous statement, and not a little disconcerting. Notice that the Lord said, “will do”; not ‘maybe’, ‘perhaps’, ‘if you feel like it’; and certainly not ‘if the doctrine of your church permits it’! If you believe you **will do!** The verb ‘believe’ is in the present tense, 2nd person singular; if you (sg) are believing you will do; it follows that if you are not doing, it is because you are not believing. $2 + 2 = 4$. Doing what? “The works that I do.” Well, Jesus preached the Gospel, He taught, He cast out demons, He healed all sorts and sizes of sickness and disease, He raised an occasional dead person, and He performed a variety of miracles (water to wine, walk on water, stop a storm instantaneously, transport a boat several miles instantaneously, multiply food, shrivel a tree—and He implied that the disciples should have stopped the storm and multiplied the food, and He stated that they could shrivel a tree [Peter actually took a few steps on water]). So how about us? The preaching and teaching we can handle, but what about the rest? I once heard the president of a certain Christian college affirm that this verse obviously could not mean what it says because it isn’t happening! Well, in his own experience, and in that of his associates (cessationists all), I guess it isn’t. But many people today cast out demons and heal, and I personally know someone who has raised a dead person. Miracles are also happening. So how about me? And you? But to get back to the ‘signs of an apostle’, if all of us are supposed to be producing miracles, that does not make us all apostles, so there must be further criteria. (Please notice the ‘further’, I am not denying the ‘signs’.)

I suggest that we must consider the matter of spiritual authority, and I begin with 2 Corinthians 10:8 and 13:10. 10:8 reads like this: “Now even if I boast a little to excess about our authority (which the Lord gave us for building up, not to tear you down), . . .” 13:10 reads like this: “This is why I write these things while absent, so that when present I may not have to deal harshly, according to the authority that the Lord gave me, for building up and not tearing down.” In both verses Paul states that the authority is for building up, not tearing down, although his mention of harsh dealing indicates that such may be included in the process, as circumstance may require. (In fact, on at least two occasions, Paul actually turned someone over to Satan!—1 Corinthians 5:5 and 1 Timothy 1:20.)

Is this not what we are to understand from 1 Timothy 1:3? “You recall that I urged you to remain in Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, in order that you should command certain persons to stop teaching a different doctrine . . .” Now the church was well established in Ephesus, yet Timothy had authority to command; I suppose that Paul designated him as his deputy. And what about 1 Timothy 5:19-20? “Do not entertain an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. 20 Those who are sinning rebuke publicly, so that the rest also may be in fear.” Evidently Timothy had authority over the elders, being competent to rebuke them publicly.

^a Well now, if we cast out demons, heal and perform miracles, isn’t that enough? Jesus wants more, He wants “greater things” than those just mentioned. Notice again that He said “will do”, not maybe, perhaps, or if your church permits. But what could be ‘greater’ than miracles? This can’t refer to modern technology because in that event such ‘greater things’ would not have been available to the believers during the first 1900 years. Note that the key is in the Lord’s final statement (in verse 12), “because I am going to my Father”. Only if He won could He return to the Father, so He is here declaring His victory before the fact. It is on the basis of that victory that the ‘greater things’ can be performed. Just what are those ‘greater’ things? For my answer, see my outline, “Biblical Spiritual Warfare”, available from www.prunch.org.

Now consider Jeremiah 1:10—“See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.” Of course this was before the Church, but there is a principle here that remains valid. If you plan to build on a site that is covered with ruins and rubble, where must you start? You must remove the wreckage. If God sent you to the church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-19), to try to straighten it out, where would you have to start? You might have to depose the leaders, as well as denounce the error. Presumably, also, you would have to be able to establish your authority over them. In Timothy’s case, Paul presumably took care of that.

Something similar happened with Titus; consider: “I left you in Crete for this reason, that you should set in order the things that were lacking and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you” (1:5). “Because there really are lots of rebels, loudmouths and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group, who must be silenced” (1:10-11). “Speak these things, whether you exhort or reprove, with all authority” (2:15). If Titus was to appoint elders, he evidently had authority over them. And to silence ‘rebels’ evidently requires authority. Now then, does anyone imagine that such situations, requiring apostolic authority, ceased to exist in 100 AD? History records no lack of such situations, and far worse, down through the centuries and millennia. In our day the degree of perversity in the churches is such that I don’t know how God can stand the stench! We desperately need people with apostolic authority who are prepared to function.

But to get back to the Text, consider Ephesians 4:11-13. “Yes, He Himself gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,^a 12 for the equipping of the saints into the work of the

^a One might imagine that this list follows the chronological sequence of the several ministries. An apostle introduces the Gospel into an area or context; a prophet gets the people’s attention and an evangelist urges them to believe; but once people are regenerated then pastors and teachers come to the fore—they are the ones who equip the saints. However, in practice, especially in a pioneer missionary situation, there are seldom that many people around. The missionary preaches the Gospel and it is up to him to teach the first converts; he is alone. A pioneer missionary, the first one to introduce the Gospel to an ethnic group or area, has an apostolic function (whether or not he himself is an apostle). But he must also function as an evangelist and as a teacher (whether or not he has those gifts).

However, most of us live and work where there are established, functioning congregations. So what would be the function of an apostle within an established, functioning congregation? If he lives and worships in that community, probably none at all, in that specific capacity—he might function as a teacher or a prophet. In a country, or area, where there is no more pioneer missionary work to be done, the exercise of the apostolic function would be itinerant, acting as God’s special emissary, an official intervener, for disciplinary and correctional purposes.

I will take up evangelist next: what would his function be within an established congregation? Well, can you evangelize someone who is already regenerated? Evidently the function of an evangelist is directed to unbelievers, who should not be members of the congregation (although some often are). Of course an evangelist might also function as a pastor or teacher. A truly gifted evangelist will function beyond the limits of a local congregation.

As for the prophetic function, I will address the question of supernatural revelation of information not available through existing channels. (1 Corinthians 14:3 speaks of ‘edification’, ‘exhortation’ and ‘comfort’ as coming from a prophet, but I will not take up such activity here.) We understand that the Canon of Scripture is closed; God is no longer giving written revelation that is of general or universal application. But that does not mean that God no longer speaks into specific situations. Divine guidance is a type of prophecy; He is giving information not otherwise available. I myself have been contemplated with a prophecy delivered by someone who had no idea who I was, and not in the context of a local congregation. The function of a true prophet cannot be limited to one congregation. Indeed, God may use a prophet at city, state or country level. Our world desperately needs prophetic voices.

A teacher will normally reside in a specific community, but his ministry may range beyond it. A pastor’s function is local, just as he is chosen and ordained locally. It is simply a fact of life that someone with a shepherd’s heart is not necessarily a good teacher, and an honest to goodness teacher

ministry, so as to build up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain into the unity of the faith and of the real knowledge of the Son of God, into a complete man, into the resulting full stature of Christ.” If verses 12 and 13 are still being worked on, then the apostles, etc. are still necessary. Verse 13 emphasizes the truth in verse 12—every believer is supposed to grow into full stature. Just because we do not reach a goal does not invalidate that goal. I would say that one of the principal causes for the lamentable spiritual condition of most churches is the total lack of the apostolic function among us—itinerant, acting as God’s special emissary, an official intervener, for disciplinary and correctional purposes. The idea of Christian or ministerial ‘ethics’, where one must not criticize a neighbor, is clearly designed to silence any prophetic or apostolic voice. It is designed to protect error.

Now consider 1 Corinthians 12:27-31. “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 28 And those whom God has appointed in the Church are: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; after that miracles, then presents of healings, helps, administrations, kinds of languages. 29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not miracle workers, are they? 30 All do not have presents of healings, do they? All do not speak languages, do they? All do not interpret, do they?^a 31 But earnestly desire the best gifts.”

It should be observed that the terminology here is clearly hierarchical: ‘1st, 2nd, 3rd, then, then, . . .’ (similar lists in other places lack this terminology) [the Kingdom of God is not a democracy]. Next, if God has appointed these functions, there must be a good reason for them, and to deliberately exclude any of them is to go against God. Here in Brazil, with a few exceptions, the churches have no place for a true teacher; they simply are not allowed. The consequences are not pretty.

Presumably even the most ardent ‘cessationist’ will grant that “teachers”, “helps” and “administrations” are still around. But this letter was written around 55 AD, well into the Church Age, therefore. Why would God “appoint in the Church” things that would be extinguished in a few decades. If miracles come “after” teachers, how can miracles be gone if teachers are still here? We have the command to “earnestly desire the best gifts”, so which ones are the best? Presumably those at the top of the hierarchical list. Why would God command us to earnestly desire a gift like apostleship, if He was going to extinguish it before the end of the first century? In such an event the command would be meaningless for the last 1900 years!

The present

often lacks a shepherd’s heart. The functions are supposed to be complementary, and the object is to get all true believers involved in the work of the ministry. Life in Christ is not a spectator sport!

^a The Greek grammar of verses 29 and 30 is plain: no gift is given to everybody—not everyone is an apostle and not everyone speaks languages. Those churches that teach that speaking in tongues is the necessary sign of being ‘baptized in the Spirit’ (and until you are ‘baptized’ you are a 2nd class citizen, if a citizen at all), have done untold damage to their people. Since the Holy Spirit simply does not give ‘tongues’ to everybody, those who do not get it are out in the cold. But the social pressure is intolerable, so many end up faking it. Since many of the leaders are also faking it, the social problem is solved; the person is ‘in’. But since Satan is the source of all lies, someone who fakes it is living a lie and invites Satan into his life. I have been in many Pentecostal, neo-pentecostal, charismatic, whatever churches and have heard thousands of people ‘speaking in tongues’—a large majority were faking it, while a few were speaking a real language, but under demonic control. (I am a linguist, PhD, and can tell when I am listening to a real language, even though I don’t understand it, because real language has structure. To know whether or not a language is demonic requires spiritual discernment.) A church that teaches a lie invites Satan into the church, and he does not hesitate. Of course some had the genuine gift.

Somewhere along the line, I heard this: ‘the status quo’ is Latin for ‘the mess we’re in’. Whether Latin or English, I imagine that most of us would agree that the world is in a bad way, and that is at least partly because the Church is in a bad way. By and large, ‘Christians’ have ceased to be salt and light in the surrounding culture (Matthew 5:13-16); they are part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. As I have already opined, the lamentable spiritual condition of most churches is a direct result of the total lack of the apostolic function among us. It would appear that that ‘lack’ began early on.

In the writings of the ‘church fathers’ that have come down to us, there appears to be no mention of ‘apostles’ after the first century. Already in the second century, the concept of a ‘bishop’ came into being, an elder having authority over other elders in a given area—so a ‘bishop’ could exercise the apostolic function within his area (but all too often the bishop became part of the problem, since bishops were not chosen by God). It did not take long before the ‘bishop of Rome’ started to claim authority over other ‘bishops’, and then there were archbishops, and so on. If I am correct in defining the apostolic function as someone ‘acting as God’s special emissary, an official intervener, for disciplinary and correctional purposes’, and if there has been a general lack of this function for 1900 years, then we should not be surprised at the ‘status quo’.

In our day we have denominations, defined by different doctrinal and procedural ‘packages’, and there is no end of splitting within such denominations. Here in Brazil we have at least five ‘Baptist’ denominations, four ‘Presbyterian’ ones, and no end of ‘Assemblies of God’, plus any number of ‘independent’ ones. We have literally thousands of self-proclaimed ‘apustles’; everywhere you turn there is an ‘apostolic ministry’. It is a generalized ego trip; no one wants to be left behind, or to appear inferior to his neighbor. They are building private empires, and fleecing the sheep in the process. I am not aware of any theological seminary in this country that teaches the students how to study the Bible, and much less how to expound it; expository preaching is almost nonexistent. In consequence, the variety of abject stupidities promulgated from the pulpits appears to be without end, doing ever increasing damage to the hearers. I am not aware of any denomination here where the biblical Text has objective authority.

But it gets worse. We actually have self-proclaimed ‘apostles’ who pontificate like this: “I am an apostle on a level with Peter or Paul, so I can disagree with them; I can change what the Bible says.” And they do; they reject plain biblical teaching and impose their own ideas on their flocks. It should be evident to any true subject of Sovereign Jesus that all such ‘apustles’ are in the service of Satan. We have already noted Ephesians 2:20, God’s household is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.” 1 Corinthians 3:11 says that “no one can lay any foundation other than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” And Revelation 21:14 informs us that the foundations of the New Jerusalem are “the twelve apostles of the Lamb”. No pipsqueak ‘apustle’ of our day is competent to alter the Sacred Text—they obviously do not believe what the glorified Christ said in Revelation 22:18-19.

To someone who intends to be totally committed to Christ and His Kingdom, the following question is obvious and necessary: What can be done to remedy, to correct the calamitous reality I have described? We must cry out to God to raise up true apostles; but this raises another question: How is an apostle to be recognized, and how can he establish his authority so as to be able to bring about necessary changes in actual situations? I see only one way, the use of supernatural power; and that power must be used to clear out wreckage before it can be used to build. I

see a difference between a prophet and an apostle in this connection: a prophet warns; an apostle inflicts. In Acts 5 Peter simply executed Ananias and Sapphira, without warning and without chance for repentance. In Acts 13 Paul inflicted blindness on the sorcerer Elymas, again without ado.

It should be obvious that anyone who starts functioning in this way will promptly be declared to be ‘public enemy number one’. Any and all leaders who are serving Satan will do all in their power to eliminate a true apostle, because of the threat to them personally and to the perverse structures they have created and maintained. It will be all out war. I am reminded of 1 Corinthians 4:11-13—“To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty; we are poorly dressed, brutally treated, and wander homeless; 12 yes, we labor, working with our own hands. Upon being reviled, we bless; upon being persecuted, we endure it; 13 upon being slandered, we exhort. We have been made as the refuse of the world, the off-scouring of whatever, to this moment.” Well now, how many of the plague of self-styled ‘apostles’ in our day would maintain their pretensions if they had to experience the conditions described above? They would run and hide.

We need to understand what Paul is saying here. To be looked down on and criticized by believers among whom one has labored is one thing. Local people with personal ambition know how to do that. For God to make us “as the refuse of the world” is something very different. How should we understand this? If we insist on proclaiming a ‘gospel’ that the world considers to be stupid, abject foolishness, we will certainly be ridiculed. But if we insist on biblical values that the world has declared to be ‘hate crimes’, we will certainly be hated and persecuted, treated as refuse. The choice of Hebrews 13:13 is upon us: “So then, let us go out to Him, outside the camp, bearing His disgrace.” The above applies to any true subject of Sovereign Jesus, but any true apostle will be the target of the total fury of the religious leaders as well. In short, to be an apostle is not for the fainthearted.

And now please consider 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, noting especially verses 10 and 11. “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and abolish by the splendor of His coming; 9 that one’s coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception among those who are wasting themselves, because they did not receive the love of the truth^a so that they might be saved.^b 11 Yes, because of this God will send them an active delusion so that they will believe the lie^c 12 and so that all may be condemned who have not believed the truth but have taken pleasure in wickedness.”^d Notice the sequence: first they reject the love of the truth; it is as a consequence of that choice that God sends the delusion. The implication is that there is a point of no return; God sends the delusion so that they may be condemned. The only intelligent choice is to embrace the truth!

^a The use of the verb ‘receive’ clearly implies an act of volition on their part; that love was offered or made available to them but they did not want it; they wanted to be able to lie and to entertain lies told by others. But the consequences of such a choice are terrible; they turned their back on salvation.

^b Since there are only two spiritual kingdoms in this world, that of Sovereign Jesus and that of Satan, “those who are wasting themselves”, in this text, are still in Satan’s kingdom and therefore wide open to his “wicked deception”. The Text states plainly that they are wasting themselves “because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved”. They are not saved.

^c Perhaps “the lie” is best illustrated in our day by the theory of evolution: ‘There is no Creator’—so there will not be any accounting; so you can do what you feel like. How terrible will be the awakening!

^d “Taking pleasure in wickedness” involves rejecting the Truth of a moral Creator who will demand an accounting, or even overt rebellion against that Creator (like Lucifer/Satan).

Consider with me the consequences of the facts enunciated in verses 10-12 for a whole nation, like Brazil, where I now live. We have many thousands of local churches that call themselves Christian. But I know of almost none that could be characterized as ‘loving the truth’. No one wants a Bible with objective authority. Humanistic, relativistic, materialistic values have taken over the churches. Biblical values are no longer acceptable. In consequence, Satan has control of the government, of education, of health services, of commerce, of the entertainment industry, in short, of the whole culture. The churches that have rejected biblical values are part of the problem—since they have rejected “the love of the truth”, they have been taken over by “active delusion”.

Note that God Himself sends that delusion with the declared objective of condemning all those who believed the lie. If God Himself visits “active delusion” upon a whole country, what possible escape is there? The only possible ‘medicine’ is “the love of the truth”. Those of us who consider ourselves to be true subjects of Sovereign Jesus need to appeal to Him to show us how to promote the love of the truth to the churches and to the society at large. Here in Brazil it may be too late, but if God’s grace still offers us a window of opportunity, we must devote ourselves to promoting the love of the truth by all possible means. I imagine that the most effective means would be the exercise of the apostolic function, and that at more than one level. I am thinking of the following: local congregations, whole denominations, and the various levels of civil government. **Dear God, please send us apostles!**

69) Where is Mt. Sinai?

I invite attention to Galatians 4:25, that declares that Mt. Sinai is in Arabia: I don’t know Paul’s definition of ‘Arabia’, but what the maps call ‘Mt. Sinai’ probably is not the real one;^a consider: When Moses fled from Pharaoh he stopped in Midian (Exodus 2:15). Midian lies on the east side of the eastern ‘rabbit-ear’ of the Red Sea (the Gulf of Aqaba), in present day Saudi Arabia. It has never been part of the so-called ‘Sinai Peninsula’. It was at “Horeb, the mountain of God” that Moses saw the ‘burning bush’ (Exodus 3:1), and in verse 12 God tells Moses: “when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain”. Mt. Horeb has always been in Midian. (Present day Saudi Arabia calls it ‘el Lowz’, and has it fenced off.) As God continues with Moses’ commission, He specifies “three days’ journey into the wilderness” (verse 18). According to Exodus 4:27 Aaron met Moses at “the mountain of God” (Horeb, in Midian), and they went together to Egypt.

When the people left Egypt, God led them on a forced march; notice the “so as to go by day and night” (Exodus 13:21). Three days of forced march (Exodus 3:18) would have gotten them close to Ezion Geber (present day Elath), and just another two days would have put them well into Midian. But then God told them to “turn back” and “encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon” (Exodus 14:2). To do this they had to leave the established route from Egypt to Arabia, and head south into the wilderness, and this led Pharaoh to conclude that they had lost their way (obviously he would have spies following them, mounted on good horses, to keep

^a The difficulty here is not in the Text itself, but in the circumstance that almost all modern maps, whether in Bibles or elsewhere, place Mt. Sinai in the peninsula between the two gulfs, Suez and Aqaba; so much so that the peninsula itself is even so named. But such a location for the mount makes the Biblical account out to be ridiculous, as I explain below, and an inspired Text should not be ridiculous.

him informed). It would have been simply impossible for them to lose their way between Goshen and the western arm of the Red Sea (the Gulf of Suez), but this is what those who place Mt. Sinai in today's 'Sinai Peninsula' are obliged to say—an evident stupidity. The Israelites would have hunted and explored all over that area, down through the years. (And why the chariots? Pharaoh could have surrounded them with foot soldiers.)

God led them down a ravine called 'Wadi Watir' which comes out on a surprisingly large beach called 'Nuweiba' (it is the only beach on that gulf large enough to accommodate that crowd of people and animals). Most of the Gulf of Aqaba is many hundreds of feet deep, with sheer sides, but precisely at Nuweiba there is a land bridge not far below the surface that goes from shore to shore, the width of the gulf at that point being close to 10 miles—the width of the land bridge is several hundred yards, so there was an ample 'causeway' for the crossing. The ravine that opens out on Nuweiba is narrow, with steep sides, so when God moved the pillar of cloud to the mouth of the ravine, Pharaoh and his chariots were blocked. They could not pass the pillar, they could not climb the sides of the ravine with chariots, and with over six hundred chariots in a narrow ravine they would have a proper 'gridlock' (lots of unhappy horses!). I suppose that God removed the pillar of cloud while part of the crowd was still on the land bridge, which encouraged Pharaoh to chase after them; and we know the rest of the story. If God let them get out to the middle, they would be five miles from either shore, too far for most people to swim.^a I take it that God's purpose was to destroy the Egyptian army so it could not be a threat to Israel in the early years.

70) Where to place a 'comma'

Acts 12:25

Since Acts was written at least two years after Paul arrived in Rome in chains, it would not have been 'published' until into the 60s. When Jerusalem was destroyed in 70, it disappeared from the Christian map for centuries—the center of gravity of the Church was now Asia Minor. Although Luke himself was no doubt very fluent in Greek, for most Christians in Asia Minor it would be a second language. If this was also true of most people who made copies of NT books (especially in the early decades), and since those books were written without punctuation (or even spaces between words), it was predictable that now and again someone would put a 'comma' in the wrong spot. I imagine that it would have been just such an event that gave rise to the peculiar set of variants that we encounter in Acts 12:25.

Throughout the NT there are numerous places where there is a more or less serious split within Family 35, with two competing readings (usually involving just one letter). But this is the **only** place (yes, only) in the whole NT where the family splinters—there are no fewer than seven variants, five of them being of some consequence.

Instead of "Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch, having fulfilled their mission", someone (or several someones) put the comma after 'returned', resulting in "Barnabas and Saul returned, having fulfilled their mission to Antioch"—but with that punctuation 'Antioch' must be changed to 'Jerusalem'. (Having done that, we have two ways of saying essentially the same thing—if you get the 'comma' right!) Following that hypothesis, that change must have occurred rather early on, and in

^a In our day chariot pieces have been discovered along that land bridge.

circumstances that resulted in that change dominating the transmission of Acts down through the years. To see what I mean we need to have the evidence before us:

1) υπεστρεψαν εις αντιοχειαν	(f ³⁵ =27.8%) (5.1%)
2) υπεστρεψαν απο ιερουσαλημ	(f ³⁵ =8.9%) D (10.9%)
3) υπεστρεψαν απο ιερουσαλημ εις αντιοχειαν	(f ³⁵ =12.7%) (7.3%)
4) υπεστρεψαν εξ ιερουσαλημ	(f ³⁵ =1.3%) ⚭A (3.6%) OC,TR
5) υπεστρεψαν εξ ιερουσαλημ εις αντιοχειαν	(f ³⁵ =11.4%) (12.2%) CP
6) υπεστρεψαν εις ιερουσαλημ	(f ³⁵ =36.7%) B (60%) RP, HF, NU
7) υπεστρεψαν εις ιερουσαλημ εις αντιοχειαν	(f ³⁵ =1.3%) (0.6%) [not a conflation, being nonsense; the copyist was aware of both, and didn't know how to choose]

It is evident that variants 2) - 5) were created deliberately; the copyists were reacting to the meaning of the whole phrase within the context (in this situation it will not do to consider the name of each city in isolation; the accompanying preposition must also be taken into account). But they were reacting to variant 6), not variant 1). However, once they were created, and as they became exemplars, those who made copies would see no problem and simply reproduce what was in front of them [so we may not add the percentages for 2) - 6) and say that Jerusalem has over 90% of the vote]. Having myself collated at least one book in over 70 MSS (and over ten entire MSS), I have observed repeatedly that the copyist faithfully reproduced a nonsensical reading—either they weren't paying attention, or their respect for the Text was such that they did not venture to change it (or in later years the monks may have been instructed to not make changes, precisely to preserve the variety of readings that had come down to them [their superiors may not have felt that they had the competence to choose one form to the exclusion of others])—so the 60% does not mean that all those copyists agreed with what they copied, or even that they understood it.

Since the normal meaning of the syntax here is the first one (they returned to Antioch), and since both the Holy Spirit and Luke knew how to write good Greek (Koine), my presuppositions lead me to choose it. But it is not only my presuppositions; consider:

- a) Acts 11:30, ο και εποιησαν αποστειλαντες, "which they also did, having sent... by B. & S." An aorist participle is prior in time to its main verb, in this case also aorist—their purpose is stated to have been realized. The author clearly implies that the offering did arrive, or had arrived, in Judea/Jerusalem. [In Acts the author seems almost to use "Jerusalem" and "Judea" inter-changeably, perhaps to avoid repetition. E.g.: 11:1 Judea, 11:2 Jerusalem (were the apostles not in Jerusalem, or immediate environs?); 11:27 Jerusalem, 11:29 Judea, 11:30 the elders (would not the ruling elders be in Jerusalem?); 12:1-19 took place in Jerusalem, but v. 19 says Herod went down from Judea to Caesarea; 15:1 Judea, 15:2 Jerusalem; 28:21 letters from "Judea" probably means Jerusalem.] Note that the next verse (12:1) places us in Jerusalem.
- b) Acts 12:25 (12:1-24 is unrelated, except that verses 1-19 take place in Jerusalem), βαρναβας και σαυλος—the action includes **both**.

- c) Acts 12:25, *υπεστρεψαν... πληρωσαντες την διακονιαν*, "they returned... having fulfilled the mission". Again, both the participle and the main verb are aorist, and both plural. "Having fulfilled the mission" defines the main verb. Since the mission was to Judea, which of necessity includes Jerusalem as its capital city, the 'returning' must be to the place where the mission originated.
- d) Acts 12:25, "also taking with them John, the one called Mark"—we have no record that John Mark had ever been in Antioch before this, so how could he return to Jerusalem if he was already there? Acts 13:13 raises the same question.

Barnabas could be viewed as returning to Jerusalem, having completed his mission to Antioch, but this could not be said of Saul. I conclude that 'to Jerusalem' cannot be correct here even though attested by 60% of the MSS. We observe that the other 40% of the MSS, plus the three ancient versions, are agreed that the motion was away from Jerusalem, not toward it. It seems to me that there is only one way to 'save' the majority variant here: place a comma between *υπεστρεψαν* and *εις*, thereby making 'to Jerusalem' modify 'the ministry'. (This was my opening hypothesis.) But such a construction is unnatural to the point of being unacceptable—had that been the author's purpose we should expect *την εις ιερουσαλημ διακονιαν* or *την διακονιαν εις ιερουσαλημ* (assuming that both the Holy Spirit and Luke were good at Greek). The other sixteen times that Luke uses *υποστρεφω εις* we find the normal, expected meaning, 'return to'. As a linguist (PhD) I would say that the norms of language require us to use the same meaning in Acts 12:25. Which to my mind leaves *εις αντιοχειαν* as the only viable candidate for the Original reading in this place. (Which, however, would not prevent copyists who were not native speakers of Greek from putting the 'comma' in the wrong spot.)

The whole contour of the evidence is troubling, strange, and as I have already observed, it is absolutely the only place in the whole NT where Family 35 splinters. Variants 1) through 5) are all votes against 6), but we must choose one of them to stand against 6)—the clear choice is 1). "To Jerusalem" has 'Number', 'Antiquity' and 'Continuity'. "To Antioch" has 'Antiquity', 'Variety', 'Continuity' and 'Reasonableness'. As Burgon would say, this is one of those places where 'Reasonableness' just cannot be ignored. I believe he would agree that his 'notes of truth' give the nod to Antioch.

71) Who bought what from whom, and where?

Stephen X Genesis

Acts 7:15-16—"So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers; and they were transferred to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor of Shechem."

When we compare this text with the relevant passages in Genesis, we appear to be confronted with some discrepancies. Who bought what from whom, and where? Genesis 33:19 informs us that Jacob bought a plot from Hamor, in Shechem. On the other hand, Genesis 23:16-20 explains that Abraham bought an area that included the cave of Machpelah from Ephron, in Hebron. That cave became the sepulcher of Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac and Rebecca, and of Jacob and Lea, because Jacob insisted upon being buried there, as indeed he was (Genesis 49:29-30, 50:13). Looking again at Acts 7, it was 'our fathers' that were buried in

Shechem, not Jacob. Indeed, Joshua 24:32 states explicitly that Joseph's bones were buried in Shechem.

Yes but, whenever did Abraham buy anything in Shechem? I believe Genesis 12:6-7 gives us the clue. Abraham stopped in Shechem and built an altar. Now then, to build on someone else's property, with that someone looking on, probably won't work very well. I believe we may reasonably deduce that Abraham bought a plot "from the sons of Hamor of Shechem". The 'Hamor' of Jacob's day would be a descendant of the 'Hamor' in Abraham's (sons were often named after their fathers). In Genesis 14:14 we read that Abraham "armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house". If we add women and children, the total number of people under Abraham's command was probably over a thousand. Well now, with such a crowd it is not at all unlikely that someone died while they were stopped at Shechem. (People older than Abraham would not have been 'born in his own house', but there were doubtless older persons in that crowd.) In that event Abraham would need space for a cemetery, if the plot he had already bought for the altar wasn't big enough, or appropriate. That sort of information may have been available to Stephen from an extra-biblical document, or he may have figured it out as I have done (in his case guided by the Holy Spirit—Acts 7:55).

Going back to Genesis 33:19, it is possible that Jacob increased the area that Abraham had bought, by purchase. But why were all of Jacob's sons buried in Shechem? I believe the answer lies in Genesis 34:27-29. We read that Jacob's sons killed all the men of Shechem, looted everything, but kept the women and children. And what do you suppose they did with the women? So where did you think they found wives for so many men? They got them from Shechem. Since Shechem was the source of their wives and material possessions, it would be a natural place for them to be buried.

To conclude: there is no discrepancy. Both Abraham and Jacob bought land in Shechem. It was Jacob's sons who were buried there, not Jacob himself.

72) Who said what?

Matthew 27:48-49 X Mark 15:36 X John 19:29-30 (Luke 23:36)

I take it that the action in John 19:29, as well as Luke 23:36, was carried out by soldiers, and should not be confused with that recorded in Matthew and Mark, although all four refer to offering Jesus sour wine to drink (since Jesus was on the cross for some six hours, there was time for several drinks). The seeming discrepancy I wish to address is in Matthew and Mark. In the NKJV, Matthew 27:48-49 reads like this: "Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. The rest said, 'Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him.'" A single man offers the drink, but the rest say, "Let Him alone,..." And Mark 15:36 reads like this: "Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, 'Let Him alone;...'" A single man offers the drink, and **he** says, "Let Him alone,..." I would not be surprised if the man involved here was John Mark himself. But whoever he was, if he knew Hebrew he knew perfectly well that Jesus was not calling Elijah, so he sarcastically repeats their statement, in disgust. I deny any discrepancy.

73) Why would God kill Moses?

In Exodus 4:24-26 we have a drastically abbreviated account of an episode that occurred when Moses started back to Egypt to rescue the Israelites. It is so abbreviated that readers down through the centuries have been puzzled by it. It is necessary to analyze the larger context, all relevant considerations.

We must go back to Genesis 17:9-14, where God imposed circumcision as the 'sign of the covenant' between Himself and Abraham, and his descendants. Especially to the point is verse 14; the uncircumcised male "shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant". In ordinary English, he was to be executed; the penalty was death.

Moses had certainly been circumcised by his parents on the eighth day, but at three months he was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and was brought up as an Egyptian. Well, not quite; the baby was returned to his mother to be nursed, and we are not told his exact age when he was taken back to Pharaoh's daughter. So we don't know how much his parents may have taught him. In any case, all his schooling was Egyptian. However, he obviously knew where he came from and had made it his business to learn about the Israelites. "When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the sons of Israel" (Acts 7:23).

Moses was forty years old when he fled to Midian and married one of Jethro's^a daughters, Zipporah, and had two sons by her. After another forty years (Moses is now eighty), God appears to him at the burning bush and commissions him to return to Egypt and deliver the Israelites. So Moses sets out, taking 'his wife and his sons' (Exodus 4:20). **However**, Moses' sons had not been circumcised!

Well now, Moses certainly knew about circumcision, and may even have tried to circumcise his sons, but Zipporah, not an Israelite, evidently stamped her foot and said "No way!" From her reaction (Exodus 4:25), it seems clear that at least part of the fault was hers, and she knew it. And Moses did not insist. But now Moses has been commissioned to lead the people of the covenant, but he himself had not kept the covenant! According to Genesis 17:14, it was the sons who should have been killed, but Moses, the father, was the one at fault for not having circumcised them when they were eight days old. By now they were doubtless grown men (when the procedure is far more painful).

God evidently determined that the situation had to be corrected, and the means He chose was dramatic! The Text does not tell us what form God used to make His presence known, or just what He did to Moses, but the man evidently was immobilized, because the woman had to perform the operation. Obviously there was a conversation, which is why Zipporah knew what she had to do. She was not happy, but she obeyed. The grown sons had to cooperate as well. Verse 25 has 'son' (singular), but presumably both had to be circumcised. Verse 26 begins by saying that then God let Moses go, which He presumably would not have done until the condition was met. Note that she used a stone (flint), and Joshua 5:2 speaks of 'flint knives'. Iron rusts and can carry tetanus, so a stone knife was definitely safer.

As a side benefit of this episode, Moses evidently sent his wife and sons back to Jethro. Then he met Aaron at Mt. Horeb and the two went on to Egypt. I say 'benefit' because the following days and weeks would be very intense, and Moses was free from domestic concerns. Exodus 18:2 states plainly that Moses had sent his wife back, and verse 5 says that Jethro took Zipporah and the two sons to Moses at Horeb. So at that point the family was finally together again. (This is the last

^a He is also called Reuel.

mention of the sons, except in Chronicles—their main claim to fame was a negative one.)

74) “You feed them!”

Mark 6:37

“You feed them!” Really now, did you ever really stop to think about that? Just tell me please, what with? How could the disciples obey that command?

Let us pause and recall the scene. The Sacred Text affirms that there were about five thousand men, without counting the women and children. Now then, whenever you see a crowd of people, what is there usually the most of—is it not women and children? In other words, I suppose that crowd was made up of at least 15,000 people. Okay, now try to imagine that you are one of those twelve disciples and you have just heard the Master say: “**You** feed them!” Now what? Did the disciples have anything? As a matter of fact, no. They had neither money (which would not have helped much since they were a long way from town) nor food. Even the five loaves and two fish belonged to somebody else.

Can it be that Jesus was playing a joke on them, or was He serious? I do not know, but I prefer to think that He would not make a joke out of such a situation. But if He was serious, how could the disciples obey? Only with a miracle. In fact, they could not see a solution and gave the problem back to Jesus to solve; which He did. But did Jesus Himself hand the bread and fish to the crowd? No. Let us think about that scene a little more and we will see that the disciples still had to exercise faith.

The Record affirms that they all ate until they were “full” or “satisfied”. It was not just a little something to tide them over. Have you ever considered how much bread and fish it would take to “fill” 15,000 people (who had gone without lunch)? It seems to me certain that when Jesus blessed and broke those loaves and fish there was not an instant multiplication, such that there was enough for everybody; the tremendous pile would have buried Jesus, the disciples and the closest of the people! Really. Just stop and think about it. It must not have been instantaneous. When Jesus placed some bread and fish in the hands of each disciple that was all there was, up to that moment.

Now then, try to imagine that you are one of those disciples with a handful of bread and fish, and you have to feed at least a thousand people (12 disciples and 15,000 people). Can you picture it? Wouldn’t you feel just a little ridiculous taking that first step toward the crowd? Somehow the disciples find the courage and approach the people. The first one helps himself and, wonder of wonders, the supply is undiminished! The second one helps himself and the supply is unchanged. It was never used up—as they went around distributing, the food kept multiplying (to have twelve bushels of leftovers, the people were also involved in passing it on). If they had tired and stopped in the middle, half the people would have stayed hungry. If the disciples had decided to eat first, I rather imagine that the miracle would have been frustrated and the crowd would have gone hungry. The disciples ate last, but they ate very well, thank you very much! (Have you ever tried eating a bushel of bread?)

I tend to smile, thinking about that picture, until I remember that the Lord Jesus is still telling us: “You give them something to eat”—only this time it is no less than 2,000 ethnic groups and 2.5 billion people perishing from an absolute lack of the Bread of Life. And we, like the disciples, say, “With what, Lord?” As long as

we are looking at our empty hands, we will not find the courage to face the challenge of the lost world. It does not depend on our empty hands, it depends on Jesus' full hands! It does not depend on our weakness and smallness, it depends on **Jesus**, on what He has and can do. We have to learn how to collaborate with God, and actually do it. In short, we need to understand how God's economy works.