

THY KINGDOM COME

2. The Biography of Jesus

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**A Teaching Commentary
of the New Testament**

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1. Birth and Childhood of Jesus

1.1 *The Word Became Flesh*

The Gospel of John gives us the briefest account of the nativity. John 1:1,14 says:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John's account of the coming of Jesus may have been the briefest, but it is also the most to the point. Jesus (the Word) has been around since before creation began. "The Word was with God, and the Word was God" speaks of the mystery that we call the Trinity. The Trinity is One God in Three Persons. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit exist as three distinct personalities functioning as one God. There is no adequate way to explain it by drawing parallels to things in our existence.

Jesus was there sharing the joy of creation. Jesus was there to share the agony of the fall of man. Jesus was there at the call of Abraham. He shared in the hundreds and hundreds of years when the Father ministered through the prophets, bringing the Word to lost mankind.

Eventually Jesus stepped down from his position on high and became one of us. For so many years the prophets had told us what the Father was like. They had told us how we are to live our lives so that we might properly relate to him. Jesus came to be the ultimate portrait of that for us. Since we had not done too well just hearing the message, perhaps we could understand better if we saw a man who had the very nature of God. Perhaps we would follow if we actually saw a man living his life submitted to the Father in such a way that he was rightly related to the Father. Perhaps we would understand the consequences of our own sin if we saw someone receive the punishment for that sin.

Thus the Word – all that we had ever been told about God – became flesh and dwelt among us. Most of us understand and appreciate that Jesus came to be the sacrifice for our sins. We are happy about that because we do not want to personally suffer the consequences of that sin. Most of us have not totally come to grips with the fact that Jesus came to be our example, however. We are glad to let him pay for our sin, but we do not necessarily want to walk away from that sin. There is a reason that Jesus is called Lord and Savior. He is Lord first because we should do what he said to do. Once we make him Lord, then he is Savior.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke give a more historical presentation of the Gospel whereas John's Gospel has more of a theological tone. One must look no further than the first fourteen verses of John to see the depth of his writing. But to get historical information about the birth of Jesus, the reader should turn to Luke (first) and then Matthew.

Luke gives the fullest account of the nativity. Matthew adds some information to that found in Luke.

1.1.1 **The Birth of John is Foretold**

Luke begins with the story of a priest, a descendant of Aaron, named Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. They were getting along in years and they were childless. They were also righteous

people who loved God. Exodus 30:1-10 tells about the Altar of Incense in the temple and the daily burning of incense that is to take place. One day it was Zechariah's turn to go in the Holy Place in the temple to burn incense. While he was in there, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and brought him a message. We read in Luke 1:13-17:

But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

The message said that John was never to take wine or fermented drink. This may be an indication that John, like Samson, was to live his life as a Nazirite. Remember that a Nazirite vowed to avoid fermented drink or any grape product, avoid contact with the dead, and avoid cutting the hair (see Numbers 6). Whether or not John was indeed a Nazirite we do not know for sure but that seems to be the implication. It does not really matter that much. What does matter is that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit his entire life.

The message also said that John would "go on before the Lord, in the spirit of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." This was John's purpose in coming – to turn the hearts of men and to prepare the way for the Lord. This message is also a fulfillment of a prophecy given by Malachi. The closing verses of the Old Testament (Malachi 4:1-6) say:

"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the Lord Almighty.

"Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

God promised to send one in the spirit of Elijah prior to the coming of the Messiah. He would turn the hearts of men and would prepare the way of the Lord. The coming of John paved the way for the coming of the Messiah.

When Zechariah heard the message, he responded with a bit of disbelief. He and Elizabeth were old. He questioned how they could have a son. Gabriel told him that as a sign that it was true, Zechariah would not be able to speak until all of it had been fulfilled. When Zechariah emerged from the temple, he was dumb. People knew that something significant had happened to him while he was inside.

1.1.2 The Birth of Jesus is Foretold

When he returned home, Elizabeth conceived. When she was in her sixth month, Gabriel paid a visit to Elizabeth's cousin, a young girl named Mary who lived in the town of Nazareth in Galilee. Mary was a virgin and was pledged to be married to a man named Joseph. In that time, a marriage was more of a long and drawn-out process than it is today. Getting married started with a formal contract. The father of the bride would agree to let his daughter enter into the marriage and the groom would typically pay a bride price to the father of the bride. After the contract was formalized, a period of time would pass before the actual wedding. During that time, the couple was said to be betrothed. They did not live together and were not fully man and wife, but being betrothed was an "official" status. Breaking a betrothment was a legal issue, similar to a divorce. At the time Gabriel appeared to Mary, she was in this state of betrothal to Joseph.

Gabriel's message to Mary is found in Luke 1:30-38:

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Luke tells us that Mary left and went to see Elizabeth. Elizabeth and Zechariah lived in a small town just outside of Jerusalem. Mary went to their home, entered, and greeted Elizabeth. Luke 1:41-44 says:

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

Not only did Elizabeth perceive what was going on with Mary, but also John, the baby inside Elizabeth, perceived that he was in the presence of the Son of God, who at the time was a baby inside of Mary. The Holy Spirit was upon John from the womb.

Luke 1:56 says that Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months. Elizabeth was in her sixth month when Mary came. We assume that Mary stayed until the baby was born, although the text does not specifically say so.

1.1.3 The Birth of John the Baptist

On the eighth day after John was born, it was time to circumcise him. That was the time when the child was given a name. People assumed that he would be named Zechariah, after his father, but Elizabeth said that he was to be named John. The people turned to Zechariah and asked him to confirm. He took a writing tablet and wrote "His name is John." Just as Gabriel had predicted, at that moment his tongue was loosed and he could speak again. He praised God and prophesied over John. Luke 1:76-79 says:

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,

because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace."

1.1.4 Joseph's Problem and God's Solution

Mary went back home. By this time, she may well have been showing signs of being pregnant. This was a real problem for Joseph. She was his betrothed. She went away for three months and came back pregnant. She offered some weird story about angels and conception by the Holy Spirit. What was he going to do?

Luke does not give us much information about Joseph. Matthew fills in the gap, however. Matthew 1:18-25 says:

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" – which means, "God with us."

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Joseph had several options in dealing with Mary. Under the law, he simply could have publicly accused her of adultery and had her stoned. He did not want to do that. It is obvious that

Joseph really loved Mary and agonized over the situation. He had decided that he would very quietly divorce her. Remember, they were not really married yet, but a betrothal required a divorce.

Before he had taken action, an angel appeared to Joseph and convinced him that the baby inside Mary really had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. The baby that she would bear was the long-awaited Messiah. His coming satisfied the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel." And when confronted with the concept of the virgin birth, Joseph had the same options that each of us have – scoff at the idea and say that it could not be true or accept it on faith, knowing that God can do anything.

1.1.5 The Significance of the Virgin Birth

The concept of the virgin birth has divided liberal from conservative theologians for hundreds and hundreds of years. It seems a bit ironic. We live in a day when any woman – including a virgin – could go to a doctor, undergo in vitro fertilization or artificial insemination, and behold, that virgin could conceive and bear a son. This is not science fiction. These are common medical procedures. If a physician, who is a created being, can bring about virgin conception and birth, then why would anyone doubt that the Creator of the universe could do the same thing?

This is not intended to minimize the miracle of the conception of Christ. The point is that we know for a fact that it is possible to bypass the normal method of conception and that it is absolutely possible for a virgin to bear a child. Knowing that, it is difficult to understand why people still scoff at the possibility of the virgin birth.

God bypassed the normal method of conception. He did it in a way that physicians have never done, however. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he caused the ovum to be fertilized. It was a miracle that set Jesus apart from every other man born of a woman.

I believe completely that Jesus was born of a virgin, but I have grappled with the question, "What difference did it make?" Is there some reason that God could not have accomplished his purpose through one born of a non-virgin? Is there some reason that God could not have chosen a married woman or perhaps a widow and allowed the Holy Spirit to cause conception in her? And to get a bit more radical, is there some reason that God could not have accomplished his redemptive purpose through one conceived in the "old fashioned" way? These questions and the proposed answers to these questions have divided students of the Bible for centuries. The issue must have been important to God. If not, it is hard to see why he would have given the church such a stumbling block.

Was the virgin birth of the Messiah an expectation of the Jews? Probably not. To completely explore this question, see my discussion of Isaiah 7:14 in [Getting Into the Promised Land Without Falling Asleep in Leviticus](#). In fact, the Hebrew word used by Isaiah is "almah," which can be translated "virgin," but would more typically be translated "young woman." It opened the door for the idea of a virgin birth, but it did not set the expectation for one. The Jews of the first century were poised waiting for the Messiah. They expected him to be from the line of David. They expected him to be born in Bethlehem. They had many expectations about their coming Messiah, but we have no evidence that a virgin birth was among those expectations.

Some have suggested that the virgin birth was necessary so that Jesus would not be born with original sin. The doctrine of original sin says that man is born guilty of sin. This concept comes primarily from two places in Scripture. Psalm 51:5 says:

Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

If one takes this literally, then David was guilty of sin before he was born. Reading the passage in context, however, and remembering that it is poetry inspired by the anguish of guilt over the sin with Bathsheba, one can conclude that this is hyperbole and not literal. Three verses later he says "let the bones you have crushed rejoice." We do not suppose that God literally crushed the bones of David, but that this is a hyperbole illustrating the pain he felt. Being conceived in sin is most likely a hyperbole expressing the guilt and unworthiness that he felt. If one takes this as a figure of speech, then it cannot be used to justify the doctrine of original sin.

Romans 5 is the other Scripture normally cited to justify the original sin doctrine. Romans 5:14-19 says:

Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Original sin is a doctrine that is more easily derived from this passage. It clearly says that condemnation came on all men because of the sin of Adam. Romans 8 teaches that all of creation was subjected to decay as a result of sin. Adam's sin brought consequences – specifically death entered the world. As a result of Adam's sin, all were subjected to this consequence. We are all born in a state where we will eventually die. There is no escaping that conclusion. There is a bit of a leap required to get from there to the doctrine of original sin, however.

Are we truly guilty before God for things that we have not done? Am I born guilty of the sins of my forefathers? I do not think so. Do I suffer the consequences of the sins of my forefathers? Yes. Absolutely. This idea was expressed in the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:4-6 says:

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

We do experience the consequences of choices made by our parents. We are born into situations that they have created. That does not make us individually accountable for their choices. However, the reality is that we tend to follow the examples set before us. Children of sinners tend to become sinners.

Adam became the example for all that follow. He led the way into sinfulness. Jesus came to be a new example. He led the way out of the consequences of sinfulness, back into a right relationship with God.

This digression has all been for the purpose of building a case to say that I do not believe in the concept of original sin. Thus I do not believe that the virgin birth was necessary to prevent Jesus from being born with original sin. For that doctrine to make sense, one also has to believe that it is possible inherit sin from a father but not from a mother. Jesus was the Son of God, but he was also the son of Mary. How did he avoid inheriting sin from her? Some have tried to answer this question by saying that Mary, too, was without sin. They suggest that she, too, was immaculately conceived. For that theory to work, however, one must assume that Mary's mother must have led a sinless life and must have been immaculately conceived, as well as her grandmother and great-grandmother, etc. Ultimately it has to go back to Eve, and we know that she had sin in her life.

So, if the virgin birth was not for the purpose of fulfilling Jewish Messianic expectations and if it was not to avoid original sin, then why was it important? Several reasons may be given.

First of all, there was Old Testament prophecy pointing to a virgin birth. Odds are that people did not realize it until after the resurrection. On this side of the cross, Matthew was able to interpret Isaiah 7:14 as pertaining to the birth of Jesus. One can go back much further than that, however, to find Scripture pointing to a Savior born of a virgin. Genesis 3:15 says:

And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel."

This was spoken by God to the serpent in the garden. At the time the Bible was written, it was unusual to call someone the offspring of a woman. In fact, the ancient concept of reproduction was that man provided the seed and woman basically acted as an incubator. The point is that people were normally thought of as the offspring of a man, not a woman. Thus this was unusual terminology – talking about one who would be the offspring of a woman (i.e. one who would have an earthly mother but not an earthly father). This one would crush the head of Satan but would himself be struck by Satan. All of this was fulfilled in Christ at the cross.

Thus the virgin birth did fulfill prophecy. The virgin birth was also necessary because Jesus was the Son of God. The Father was his father.

The main purpose for the virgin birth, however, seems to be that of serving as a sign to those around Jesus that there was something special about this child. I do not think that they really understood it until after the resurrection. Still, from the start, from the very conception of Jesus, God the Father demonstrated to the world that he was sending someone very special who would lead them into righteousness. Initially the sign was primarily to Mary and Joseph, who needed to understand who was coming into their home. Eventually the sign would be to the whole world.

Before leaving the topic of the virgin birth, reconsider the Isaiah passage one more time. Isaiah 7:14 says, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." What was the point that Isaiah was trying to make when he delivered this passage? As I stated in the section on this verse in [Getting Into the Promised Land Without Falling Asleep in Leviticus](#), I do not think that the issue of a virgin birth was the point of this prophecy. The significant word in the prophecy is not "virgin;" it is "Immanuel." "Immanuel" is actually two words in Hebrew meaning "God with us." That was the hope that Isaiah offered and the promise

that was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. Jesus came to be "God with us." The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

When the angel told Joseph what was happening, Joseph, like Mary, acted in faith. He took Mary as his wife. The Matthew text says that they remained chaste until after the birth of Jesus.

1.1.6 The Birth of Jesus

This leads us back to Luke. Luke 2:1-20 is the passage that most people cite for the story of the nativity. Rome had issued an order that a census must be taken of the Roman Empire. This census would be used for taxation purposes. The census required that every man return to his ancestral home to be registered.

Joseph was a descendant of David. David's family was from Bethlehem. Thus Joseph had to go to Bethlehem. He took Mary with him. She was extremely pregnant.

Joseph neglected to call ahead and make reservations at the Bethlehem Sheraton. When they arrived, it was full. So were the Ramada and the Holiday Inn. OK, so they did not have a Sheraton and a Ramada, but there was an inn. And it was full. They really needed a place to stay, because Mary was going into labor.

In fact, if they had found room in the inn, it would not have been very conducive to giving birth. Inns were very public places. If they had been able to stay there, they would have most likely shared sleeping quarters with a herd of other taxation travelers. It would not have been a very private setting for having a baby.

God providentially provided them with space in a barn. In the privacy of that setting, Mary gave birth to Jesus. A feeding trough (a manger) was appropriated and used as a crib for the baby.

Outside of Bethlehem were the fields where Ruth once gleaned grain from Boaz. The night that Jesus was born, there were shepherds in those same fields, tending their sheep. An angel appeared to them, shining with the glory of God, and told them that their Savior had been born that night. They could go into the town and find the baby lying in a manger. Suddenly a great chorus of angels appeared and sang praises to God. When the angels had left, the shepherds went into town and found Jesus. They told Mary and Joseph what had happened to them. This was another sign to Mary and Joseph, affirming to them the nature of this child that had been entrusted to them.

1.2 Jesus' First Visit to the Temple

When Jesus was eight days old, Mary and Joseph took him to the temple in Jerusalem to be circumcised, according to the law. They also came to make an offering for him, their firstborn male, as prescribed in Exodus 13:1. While they were there, a man named Simeon was present. Luke 2:26-35 says:

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you now dismiss your servant in peace.

For my eyes have seen your salvation,

which you have prepared in the sight of all people,

a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

The prophecy was significant. So was the fact that Joseph and Mary had been given another sign. While they were there, a prophetess named Anna was also present. She, too, prophesied over Jesus.

The Luke passage indicates that sometime after this, Joseph and Mary returned to Nazareth. Matthew tells us that this return was not immediate.

1.3 The Wise Men

Matthew 2 tells us that sometime after the events just described, a group of Magi, or wise men, came from the east (probably somewhere in the former Babylonian Empire) to Jerusalem. Matthew 2:2 says that they went about Jerusalem saying “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

One might wonder who these men were and how they knew that the king of the Jews had been born. Remember that the Jews had spent seventy years in the east living in captivity. While they were there, they actively practiced their religion. Their teachings would have been imparted to their captors. These wise men from the east knew of the prophecies of a coming Messiah. They saw a star, which to them was a sign of his coming.

The story of these wise men has been dramatized and distilled into the tale of three kings of the orient who followed a star right to the stable, appearing the night Jesus was born, along with the shepherds, the cows, the sheep, and “the little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.” In fact, there was an unspecified number of wise men. We have no indication that they were kings. They saw a star that prompted them to go to Jerusalem, not Bethlehem. It is extremely unlikely that they appeared the night that Jesus was born. And the little Lord Jesus probably did cry just like any other baby.

King Herod heard that there were wise men from the east asking about the newborn king of the Jews. Herod was not a person who was socially secure. He spent his life fortifying himself against his subjects because he believed (rightly so) that they hated him and wished to overthrow him. News of a newborn king of the Jews would not have comforted him. He called together his religious advisors and asked where the Messiah was to be born. They cited Micah 5:2 and told him Bethlehem. He summoned the wise men. He first found out from them when they had seen the star appear. He wanted to know how long ago this new king was born. He then sent them to Bethlehem and told them to find the new king, to pay homage to him as they wished, and then to come back and let Herod know where he was so that Herod, too, could pay him homage.

They came to Bethlehem. They found Jesus. They gave him gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh. Gold is a gift for a king. Incense is burned to God. Myrrh was a spice used in burial. The gifts were very significant, even prophetic of the life of Jesus.

God warned the wise men in a dream not to return to Herod. They went back home another route. God also warned Joseph to get his family out of Bethlehem. He left and took Mary and Jesus to Egypt to live for a time.

1.4 The Bethlehem Slaughter and the Flight to Egypt

Herod realized that the wise men were not going to return. He went on a paranoid rampage. Based on when the wise men said that the star had appeared, he issued an order that all baby boys in Bethlehem two years old or less should be murdered. (This is why we surmise that the wise men appeared well after Jesus was actually born. We assume that it was about two years from the time that the star appeared until the slaughter took place.) Matthew says that this killing fulfilled the words of Jeremiah 3:15, Rachel (who died in Bethlehem) weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted. Note that a similar slaughter happened at the time Moses was born. Both times, one had been born who would lead the people out of bondage and into promise. Both times Satan did what he could to put an early end to that deliverer.

Shortly after this, Herod died. God told Joseph he could return from Egypt. This fulfilled the words of Hosea 11:1, "out of Egypt I called my son." When Herod died, his territory was divided among his three sons. Archelaus inherited Judea. Matthew 2:22-23 says, "But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth." This implies that Joseph may not have originally intended to return to Nazareth. There could have been good reasons for that. When he left, many people in that town probably thought that Mary had become pregnant under questionable conditions. Joseph might have intended simply to settle down and make a new life in Bethlehem. God intended Jesus to be raised in Nazareth, however. Joseph feared that Archelaus might try to harm Jesus as his father, Herod had tried to do. Thus he returned to Nazareth and started life with his new family.

1.5 Jesus as a Young Boy

What was it like to have Jesus as a little boy? He was a human baby in every way. Jesus needed to be fed. He needed to have his diaper changed. He needed to be held and loved. When did he realize that he was the Son of God? We do not know. What was it about him that allowed him to go through the "terrible two's" without sin?

A hint of the answer to this may have been seen in the story of the time that Mary visited Elizabeth. We saw that John was anointed by the Holy Spirit from the womb. If that was true of John, then surely it was true of Jesus. Somehow the Spirit was present with Jesus during those terrible two's such that he had peace. Even at that age, Jesus had to be obedient to the leading of the Spirit, but the Spirit was there. The Spirit taught him early who he was. We know that he understood who he was by the age of twelve. Luke 2:41-52 tells us of the time that Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem when he was twelve. On their way back home they discovered that Jesus was missing. They returned to Jerusalem and looked for him. Three days later they found him in the temple courts, listening to the teaching and asking amazing questions. When his parents found him, they asked him why he had left them and caused them to search for him.

His response in Luke 2:49 was, "Why were you searching for me? ... "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

Jesus went home with his parents. Luke 2:52 says, "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." The same is said of young Samuel in 1 Samuel 2:26. We have no other information about his growing-up years. The narration of his life picks up when he is about thirty years old.

1.6 The Genealogy of Jesus

Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38 both give the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew begins with Abraham and works his way through David down to "Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (Matthew 1:16). Note several things. Matthew is demonstrating that Jesus is heir to the covenant made with Abraham and he is also heir to the covenant made with David. Matthew also words his genealogy such that Jesus is the son of Mary, whose husband was Joseph. He does not say that Jesus was the son of Joseph.

Luke is a bit more pointed in this. Luke's genealogy begins with "Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph" (Luke 3:23). Luke begins with Jesus and works backwards through David and through Abraham, all the way back to Adam.

The observant reader will notice that the genealogies in Matthew and Luke do not match exactly. Inquiring minds want to know why.

Table 1 - Genealogy of Jesus

Matthew's Genealogy	Luke's Genealogy
Jesus	Jesus
Joseph	Joseph
	Heli
	Matthat
	Levi
	Melki
	Jannai
	Joseph
	Mattathias
	Amos
Jacob	Nahum
Mattan	Esli
Eleazar	Naggai
Eliud	Maath
Akim	Mattathias
Zadok	Semein
Azor	Josech
Eliakim	Joda
Abuid	Joanan
Zerubbabel	Rhesa
Shealtiel	Zerubbabel
Jeconiah	Shealtiel
Josiah	Neri

Matthew's Genealogy	Luke's Genealogy
Amon	Melki
Manasseh	Addi
Hezekiah	Cosam
Ahaz	Elmadam
Jotham	Er
Uzziah	Joshua
Jehoram	Eliezer
Jehoshaphat	Jorim
Asa	Matthat
Abijah	Levi
Rehoboam	Simeon
Solomon	Judah
	Joseph
	Jonam
	Eliakim
	Melea
	Menna
	Mattatha
	Nathan
David	David
Jesse	Jesse
Obed	Obed
Boaz	Boaz
Salmon	Salmon
Nahshon	Nahshon
Amminadab	Amminadab
Ram	Ram
Hezron	Hezron
Perez	Perez
Judah	Judah
Jacob	Jacob
Isaac	Isaac
Abraham	Abraham
	Terah
	Nahor
	Serug
	Reu
	Peleg
	Eber
	Shelah
	Cainan
	Arphaxad
	Shem
	Noah
	Lamech
	Methuselah
	Enoch
	Jared
	Mahalalel
	Kenan

Matthew's Genealogy	Luke's Genealogy
	Enosh
	Seth
	Adam

Unfortunately Luke's genealogy does not contain a statement saying "Here is why my list is different than Matthew's ..." Thus we can only conjecture why there is a discrepancy. It is generally assumed that neither genealogy attempts to list every ancestor, and thus generations have probably been skipped in both. Still there appear to be discrepancies. Two explanations have been offered, both of which could make sense.

Some have suggested that one of the genealogies traces Jesus' lineage through Joseph, whereas the other traces it through Mary. One's ancestral line would normally be traced through the father. Jesus, on the other hand, was not the biological son of Joseph. Any human lineage that he had would really be through Mary. Thus there could be a difference in the manner in which the lines were reckoned. The two lines converge from Abraham through David and then shoot off in separate directions. This could mean that Mary and Joseph were both descendants of David.

There is a second possible explanation for the discrepancy. Some have suggested that the genealogy in Luke traces biological descent, whereas the Matthew genealogy traces regal descent. If one were to follow the line of succession to a throne, it would not strictly follow biological descent. If a king died without having children, for instance, then the succession might go to a nephew. Matthew's genealogy may have been designed to show that Jesus was not only a biological descendant of David, but that he would have been the successor to David's throne had the monarchy still been in place.

Whatever the reason is for the discrepancy, we do know that Jesus was a son of Abraham, a son of Judah, and a son of David. He was in a position to fulfill all of the promises made in the Old Testament.

2. Jesus' Call to Ministry

2.1 The Ministry of John

John the Baptist is the last prophet of the Old Testament. That does not mean the book – the Old Testament. That means the covenant – the Old Testament. Like the other Old Testament prophets, he tried to bring the people to repentance and he pointed the people to the coming Messiah. As a prophet of the Old Testament, however, John had a very unique role to play.

John the Baptist and Jesus were related – perhaps second cousins. We have already seen (Luke 1:36) that Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, the mother of John, were relatives, although the text does not specify the relationship. Some have suggested that Jesus and John played together as children. Although this is possible, it is unlikely since Jesus grew up in Nazareth and John near Jerusalem. They had probably met sometime during their growing-up years, but my guess is that Jesus and John were basically strangers. Still, their lives were intertwined according to God's plan.

Malachi 4:5-6 closes the Old Testament with the words:

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.

God had promised that before the day of the Lord comes, he would send one in the spirit of Elijah to turn the hearts of the people. There would be a forerunner to the Messiah. Isaiah had also prophesied of this one who would prepare the way for the Messiah. Isaiah 40:1-5 says:

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.
A voice of one calling:
"In the desert prepare
the way for the Lord ;
make straight in the wilderness
a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all mankind together will see it.
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Isaiah used an image that would have been familiar to his audience. In that day and age, when a king would travel, it was common to send a road crew ahead of the king to ensure that the road was properly prepared. If the road had holes in it, they would be filled (the valleys raised up). If it had bumps in it, they would be leveled (the mountains and hills made low). Rough spots would be smoothed. The ultimate king was coming and John was the road crew sent ahead to prepare the way. John's job was to begin turning the hearts of the people back to righteousness so that they would be ready to hear the message of Jesus.

Luke 3:3 says, "He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Preaching was nothing new. Baptism, however, is something that we do not see in the Old Testament. What is this practice and where did it originate?

Baptism does not occur in the Old Testament. The closest reference that we can find to anything resembling baptism is in Ezekiel 36:25-27:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Still, this reference is obscure and probably not a legitimate Old Testament foundation for New Testament baptism. So where did this practice originate?

The idea of ritual bathing is not unique to Christianity. Other religions include this in their practices. Most of us have seen pictures of Hindus bathing in the river Ganges. Some religions believe that the waters of certain rivers have mysterious life-giving powers and thus bathing in these rivers is of great benefit to the individual. Because Jews and Christians reject the deification of inanimate objects (such as rivers), it would be difficult to see these "life-giving" ritual baths as the source of our practice of baptism.

Judaism also had a certain amount of ritual bathing in its practices. Levitical practices included ritual cleansing with water to make priests ceremonially clean. Non-Levites also practiced ritual bathing that was supposed to bring about spiritual cleanliness. A visitor today to Qumran can see the remains of the ritual baths in that community. Furthermore, Jews practiced baptism for new converts coming into Judaism. When a Gentile converted to Judaism, part of the process included going through a baptism, symbolic of cleansing him from his former life and birthing him into his new. Thus John did not introduce a new concept to the Jews; they were already familiar with baptism. John put a new spin on it, however. He baptized people who were already Jews.

John's baptism had a new meaning. John came to prepare the way for the Messiah. He did this by calling people to repentance. John's baptism was symbolic of entering into that repentance. John's baptism initiated people into the select group that had been prepared for the coming of the Messiah.

If that is true, why was Jesus baptized by John? Jesus did not need to repent. Furthermore, he did not need to enter into the select group waiting for the Messiah; he was the Messiah. The baptism of Jesus changed the meaning of the ritual. He served as a bridge between the old baptism and the new. In going through this act, Jesus identified with those whom John had baptized. It was his coronation as king of those who were hungering and thirsting after righteousness. It opened the door for Christian baptism, which would follow.

The Bible does set apart the baptism of John and Christian baptism. We see this in Acts 18:25 (speaking about Apollos):

He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.

Again, in Acts 19:3-5 a distinction is made:

So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

John's baptism was a sign one was repentant and expectantly waiting for the Messiah. The meaning of Christian baptism has divided the church for centuries. It has caused denominations to split. Some believe that baptism must be by immersion; others sprinkle. Some believe that it is necessary to be baptized to be saved. This results in practices such as infant baptism. Others believe that it is an act of obedience by one who is already saved. All of these viewpoints have Scriptural backing. For instance, Mark 16:16 says:

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Many take this as a clear indicator that baptism is necessary for salvation. Others point to verses such as Acts 16:30-33:

He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.

This seems to indicate that faith in Jesus alone is sufficient for salvation and that baptism is an act of obedience that follows.

Some understanding of the nature of baptism can be derived from the word itself. The word "baptize" comes from the Greek word "baptizo," which means "to immerse" (so much for those who sprinkle). In fact, there are two words in Greek with the basic meaning of "immerse." The other is "bapto." "Baptizo" is an intense form of "bapto." "Bapto" is used to indicate dipping, rinsing, washing, or whatever. "Baptizo" is used to indicate more permanent forms of immersion. When a ship sinks, "baptizo" is used rather than "bapto." When somebody drowns, "baptizo" is used rather than "bapto." Actually a good illustration of the difference was found in an ancient recipe for pickles. At one point, the recipe said that the cucumbers should be washed, using the word "bapto." Later the recipe said that the cucumbers should be immersed in the pickling juices and spices, using the word "baptizo." The washing was a temporary thing, affecting the outside of the cucumber only. The "baptism" was permanent, changing the very nature of the cucumber to a pickle. When you wash a cucumber, changing a dirty cucumber to a clean one, you can undo that action – you can make the cucumber dirty again. When you change a cucumber to a pickle, you cannot change it back. The change is forever.

That is what Christian baptism is all about. It is symbolic of the fact that a person has immersed himself in Jesus and has been changed permanently in the transaction. Romans 6:3-4 says:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Baptism is symbolic of putting to death our old nature and being permanently changed, receiving a new life – all of this by having faith in the benefit won for us by the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the nature of Christian baptism.

John's baptism pointed the way to Christ and to Christian baptism, calling people to repentance and instilling in them an expectant hope of the coming Messiah. Providing this baptism of repentance was one of the ministries of John. The other was preaching.

John did not mince words in his messages. Luke 3:7-9 says:

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

Obviously, this was not necessarily a comfortable message for the people. They wanted to know what they needed to do to repent. Luke 3:10-14 continues the discussion.

“What should we do then?” the crowd asked.

John answered, “The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.”

Tax collectors also came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”

“Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.

Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?”

He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.”

As I have said, John is the last of the Old Testament prophets. His message is not very different from that of other Old Testament prophets. He told the people that God has a standard for how they treat one another. That standard does not include taking advantage of other people. We are to care for one another.

John made quite an impression on people. Some thought that he might be the Messiah. John 1:15-27 records:

John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’” From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.

Now this was John’s testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Christ.”

They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?”

He said, “I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?”

He answered, “No.”

Finally they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

“I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”

They asked John if he was the Christ, if he was Elijah, and if he was "the Prophet." Numerous prophecies in the Old Testament point to the coming of the Christ. Malachi 4:1-6 is the prophecy indicating the return of Elijah. We already discussed that when we talked about the prophecy concerning the birth of John. "The Prophet" is a reference to Deuteronomy 18:18. God had promised to send the people another prophet like Moses. This was fulfilled in Jesus, not in John.

In his answer to these and other questions, John faithfully pointed the people to the Messiah whose coming was imminent.

At this point in his life, I do not think that John knew for sure who the Messiah was. John 1:33 says "I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'" Apparently God did not tell John, "Your cousin Jesus is the Messiah." He did tell John that the day would come when John would baptize a man and he would see the Holy Spirit come down and remain on this individual. John was looking for that day.

2.2 The Baptism of Jesus

Luke 3:21-22 says:

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.

It is hard to know the impact that this event had on Jesus. How much did he really understand about who he was prior to this event? We know that at age twelve when he was at the temple there was something very unique about him, but how much did he understand at that time? Was he truly empowered for ministry prior to his baptism? Was the coming of the Holy Spirit a sign to him as it was a sign to John? I do not know the answer to these questions. I do believe that it was the Father's will that Jesus wait until this point in his life to begin his Messianic ministry and that the Holy Spirit was sent to him at this time to unleash him for this purpose.

We do know the impact that this event had on John. The coming of the Holy Spirit was the sign that he had been expecting. When this happened, John knew that Jesus was the Messiah. John 1:29-31 says:

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

Many of John's followers became followers of Jesus. Some of John's friends expressed concern to him that Jesus was "stealing the show." John's response in John 3:30 was "He must increase; I must decrease." In John 3:27-29, John viewed himself as the attendant celebrating with the bridegroom. He was humble. He was not out to gather for himself a following. He knew that his purpose was to point people to the Christ and he did that faithfully.

And, as I said earlier, John did not mince words. Philip, the son of Herod, had a wife named Herodias. Philip's brother, Herod Antipas, was a more powerful ruler than was Philip. Thus Herodias left Philip and married Herod Antipas. John boldly challenged them for this. Luke 3:19-20 tells us that John publicly denounced Herod and Herodias for their evil lifestyles. Because of this, Herod arrested John. John would spend the rest of his life in prison. His public ministry was complete.

2.3 The Wilderness Experience of Jesus

Matthew 4 and Luke 4 both tell us that Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days after his baptism. Matthew 4:1 tells us that he was led by the Spirit into the desert. When the children of Israel left Egypt to enter the Promised Land, they had to spend forty years in the wilderness first. God had a plan for them – a significant role for them to play. Before they could effectively perform their function as the chosen people, he had to teach them and test their faithfulness first. The same thing happened to Jesus; it just took less time.

The baptism of Jesus was his initiation into ministry. Having been publicly affirmed by God as "My Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17), it was time for Jesus to have some intensive one-on-one time with his Father. Thus the Holy Spirit led him into the wilderness, away from any worldly distractions, where he could spend time in intensive training.

A desert experience is not fun. It is hot and dry. There is little or no food or water. There is no television. It is hard to find a place to take a shower. Perhaps hardest is the fact that the desert is a place where we are stripped of the resources that we normally use to control our lives. Absolute reliance on the grace of God to provide for one's needs and complete yielding to his direction is necessary. But the exciting thing about the desert experience is that we learn that when we look to God for provision, he provides completely. When we totally yield control to him, he leads perfectly. If you think about the major characters in the Bible, you realize that the desert experience is common. Abraham had a desert experience – from the time God called him out of Ur of the Chaldees until he planted him in the land that would be his own. Jacob had a desert experience – from the time he fled from Esau until the time he returned. Moses had a desert experience – from the time he fled Egypt until he returned to lead the people out of slavery. The children of Israel had a desert experience – forty years of wandering prior to entering the Promised Land. Jesus had a desert experience – forty days after his baptism. The message is fairly clear. When God selects people to play a significant role in ministry, he leads them through the desert first, for a time of teaching and testing. This is Jesus' time.

Luke 4:1-14 describes the experience:

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you
to guard you carefully;

they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

Jesus answered, “It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

In the past, when I read this passage, I envisioned Satan in bodily form manifesting in the desert and having a conversation with Jesus. That could have happened. The more I understand about the nature of Satan and the more I understand about the mission of Jesus, the less that I believe that to be true. I believe that Satan came to Jesus like he comes to us most of the time – in thoughts and suggestions being whispered in our ears. And I believe that Jesus had to fight these temptations using the same weapons that have been allocated to each of us. If Satan had appeared bodily to Jesus, it would have been too obvious what was happening – just as would be true with us. He came in the form of ideas that seemed to make good sense – just as he normally does with us. The primary weapon that Jesus had to fight off these suggestions was his knowledge of the Father's voice – still the primary weapon available to any of us that will learn to use it.

The time in the wilderness followed the baptism, which was Jesus' initiation into Messianic ministry. His time alone with the Father was used to teach him more about who he was and what his mission was to be. During that time, he came to understand the power that was available to him through the Holy Spirit. He also came to understand what he was to do with that power. It was given for a purpose and was to be used under the leadership of the Father.

So he was in the wilderness for forty days without eating. He was very hungry. Satan whispers in his ear, "You're really hungry. It is not necessary that you be hungry. You have power. God gave you the power to use it. Use it to turn some of these stones into bread. It makes sense." Jesus was hungry. There was nothing wrong with him recognizing his need to eat. Satan came to him with a half-truth. The Father did not want Jesus to be hurting from physical hunger. That was true. The problem is that turning stones into bread was not the Father's plan for feeding him. He knew the Father's voice and knew that this was not from him. He also remembered the words of Deuteronomy 8:1-5, which described the wilderness experience of the children of Israel:

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your forefathers. Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

He knew that the children of Israel were sent into the desert for forty years to teach them obedience. He knew that he had been sent into the wilderness for forty days to be taught obedience. The Father was not leading him to use his supernatural abilities to turn stones into bread (even though there may have been nothing inherently wrong with doing that) and thus it was the wrong thing to do. So he did not do it.

Some time probably elapsed between the first and the second temptation. I do not think these three happened in rapid succession. During his time in the desert, Jesus came to understand that he was to be a king. He would be given authority over the world. The day would come when every knee would bow to him and every tongue confess his name. He also knew that the road to that kingship would be long and painful, ending in a painful physical death. Satan whispered to him "God really wants you to have authority and splendor. Surely there must be a better way to get it than to go through all this pain. Surely there is a quicker and better way to achieve the Father's plan. Maybe an alliance with the enemy would be more effective than warfare with him. Couldn't we achieve peace and unity quicker that way? It makes sense."

Jesus was offered another half-truth. God really did intend to give Jesus authority and splendor. Jesus knew that it was his. It was not to be achieved by worshipping Satan, however. Again Jesus knew that this was not the Father's voice. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13 to Satan and confirmed to himself that he would worship God alone and serve him only.

The third temptation was similar to the second. Satan suggested to Jesus a shortcut to achieving his mission. He whispered, "Your job is to gather a following. What better way to do that than to put on a really great stunt show? Go throw yourself off the highest point of the temple and let God catch you and break your fall. People would be really impressed. You would have an immediate following. It makes sense." This time Satan even quoted Scripture to Jesus, citing Psalm 91:11-12 as justification for the act. Jesus knew the Scriptures, however. Psalm 91 is not about putting yourself in danger so that God can pull you out. Psalm 91:1-4 begins the psalm:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."
Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

This psalm teaches us that if we dwell in the shelter of the Father, which implies going where he goes and doing what he does, then we will enjoy his protection. If you are going to rest in the shadow of God then you have to move with the shadow. It says nothing about darting away from God's presence and expecting him to come rescue you out of stupid situations. Satan was trying to lure Jesus away from the Father's presence and from his protection. Jesus responded by reminding Satan that Deuteronomy 6:16 says that we should not put God to the test.

You might ask, "What would have been so wrong with Jesus gathering a following in this manner?" In fact, Jesus went to great lengths to keep his supernatural feats quiet. When he healed, he often told people not to tell who did it. When demons announced that he was the Son of God, he silenced them. At the wedding in Cana, he was very reluctant to let people know that he was capable of turning water into wine. Why is this? Wouldn't these have been good signs and wonders that would have brought him the following that he needed?

Jesus did not come to gather a signs and wonders seeking crowd. He came to gather those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness. If he had started out doing stunt shows, he would never have been able to teach the truth that he came to bring. That was his mission. The only way to accomplish it was through the slow and painful process that he endured.

There are reasons that God gives us what he does when he does. What Satan offered Jesus were shortcuts to things that the Father was going to provide anyway. To have achieved these things Satan's way would have been to express impatience or even a lack of faith in God and it would have robbed God of the joy of providing these things in his own perfect time.

We don't do God's things our way.

The episode concludes with Luke 4:13, "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." James 4:7 says, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Satan does have better things to do than harass someone who will not yield to temptation. If you ignore his suggestions, he will pull away for a time. He will also return later to see whether or not you have weakened and are vulnerable. The topic of Spiritual Warfare has gripped the church in recent years. People look for formulas where we pray just right and bind this and cast out that so that we will be powerful spiritual warriors. In fact, what we have in these two verses above is the entire key to being an effective spiritual warrior. Submit to God and resist the devil and he will flee. He will return at an opportune time, so be ready. Total obedient submission to God is the only way to effective spiritual warfare.

The wilderness experience of Jesus is so relevant to each of us. Some things that we can learn from this include:

- Satan will almost certainly try to disrupt time with the Father. At those times when we try to focus and learn, he will try to distract us.
- It is highly unlikely that Satan will come to us in bodily form. He normally comes in the form of thoughts and suggestions.
- He will offer shortcuts to things that the Father wants to give us anyway. If we do it his way, we may very well lose the thing that the Father wanted to give us. For example, the Father wants us to have happiness and security. Satan may convince us that a new car would bring happiness and security – something that the Father wants us to have. We buy the new car, which we cannot afford. The result is misery and insecurity.
- His suggestions seem very logical. If the reasoning going through our minds conclude with "It makes sense," or "What difference does it make," look out. If it concludes with "It is the right thing to do," go with it.
- If you resist the devil, he will flee. He will return later to see if you are still strong.

Also, before leaving the subject altogether, I want to make sure that we do not give Satan more credit than he deserves. He may be the father of deception, but most of us are willing partners much of the time. Buying a new car that we cannot afford is just as likely to be something that we rationalize, strategize, and convince ourselves to do as it is something that Satan convinced us to do. The resulting misery and insecurity is the same. Many people view themselves as innocent bystanders rather than victims of all the poor decisions they have made. The fact is that we are very capable of bringing trouble on ourselves. If we view ourselves as responsible and in control rather than putty in the hands of the devil, then we are more likely to make proper choices.

3. The Ministry of Jesus Begins

After the wilderness experience, the ministry of Jesus began. Matthew 4:12-17 tells us

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali – to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the way to the sea, along the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles –

the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.”

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Matthew makes reference to Isaiah 9:1-2, which looked forward to the day when the Messiah would emerge in Galilee and begin his ministry. Jesus fulfilled that expectation.

The parallel passage in Luke gives us much more information about this very early phase of Jesus' ministry. Luke 4:14-30 says:

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn't this Joseph's son?” they asked.

Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”

“I tell you the truth,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed – only Naaman the Syrian.”

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Jesus began teaching. It says that he returned from the wilderness experience "in the power of the Spirit." After forty days of intensive training, Jesus was certainly anointed for the mission ahead of him. He would have had the Spirit of God on him in a powerful way.

He went about the countryside preaching and his reputation began to grow. At some point, he returned to his hometown of Nazareth. On the Sabbath, he went to the synagogue and they asked him to speak. He opened the scroll of Isaiah and read Isaiah 61:1-2 and told them that this prophecy was being fulfilled in their midst. And in reading them this passage, he identified to them and to us what his mission was. It included:

- Preaching good news to the poor
- Proclaiming freedom for prisoners
- Recovery of sight for the blind
- Releasing the oppressed
- Declaring the year of the Lord's favor

These can be taken two ways (physically and spiritually) and I think that they are both correct. Jesus came to physically upgrade the status of the poor. The Old Testament talks repeatedly about caring for the poor. Part of Jesus' ministry was to continue that emphasis. The church of Jesus Christ should care for the less fortunate. It was part of his mission; it should be part of ours.

Jesus came to bring physical freedom. This is in line with bringing good news to the poor. When men oppress men, freedom is lost. Jesus stood up for the rights of the undertrampled; so should his church.

Jesus brought physical healing, not only to the blind, but also to men afflicted with all kinds of ills. He equipped his followers to do the same. The church should be an instrument of physical healing to the hurting world around it.

Jesus addressed each of these on a spiritual level as well. He came to men enslaved by sin, imprisoned by hopelessness, and oppressed by a lack of knowledge. He came to those blinded to the Father. To these he brought release, hope, and vision. He set them free. His church should have the same mission.

Jesus came to a world void of hope and reminded it that the Lord's good favor was still within reach. Too long the world had listened to the lies of the enemy. People had been told that they lacked value, that they were losers, and that they were of no use and no interest to the Father. Jesus showed them the truth and showed them the way back into God's favor. That was part of his mission; it should be part of the mission of his church as well.

The people in Nazareth did not know exactly what to make of Jesus. We gather from the text that they had heard about his preaching in the area. We infer that Jesus had worked miracles other places and that they wanted to see him work miracles in their midst. Jesus had faced this temptation before. When Satan suggested that Jesus throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple, he was suggesting that Jesus gather a flock of followers by putting on a miracle sideshow. Jesus wanted followers who were attracted to the truth he brought and not ones who liked the tricks he could do. This is the situation that he faced in Nazareth.

He had just explained to the people what he was all about. They wanted to see him perform. He responded that a prophet is never accepted in his hometown. He reminded them of incidents in the lives of Elijah and Elisha, where they were able to work miracles with Gentiles that they could not work with Jews – the hometown folks.

The people were angry. First Jesus said that he personally was the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah – the Messiah. Then he refused to do Messiah miracles to entertain them. Their anger was intense and many of them wanted to kill him. They tried to take him to a cliff and throw him off. God protected him. He was able to walk through the crowd and leave safely.

Luke 4:31-37 continues:

Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.

In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, "Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!"

"Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.

All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!" And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

Jesus left Nazareth. Never again would it be his home. He set up his base in Capernaum, on the north of the Sea of Galilee. This would be the primary location for his ministry the rest of his natural life. The people in Nazareth demanded miracles. The people in Capernaum "were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority." What a difference. They listened to what he said. It was here that he began to gather those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness. It was here that he built the "inner circle" known as the twelve disciples.

4. The Gathering of Disciples

The Gospels contain various bits and pieces describing how Jesus met his disciples. Matthew 4:18-21 says:

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Mark 1:16-20 repeats this almost verbatim.

Luke 5:1-11 says:

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Matthew 9:9 says:

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

Again, Mark 2:13-14 repeats this in very similar words:

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

Luke 5:27-28 also records this:

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

Matthew 10:1-3 says:

He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Mark 3:13-19 says:

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Luke 6:12-16 says:

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

John 1:35-51 says:

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"

"Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."

"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."

Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

This is about all of the information that we have about how Jesus met and called his disciples.

John does not name the twelve disciples. The lists in Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not agree exactly.

Table 2 - List of Apostles

Matthew's List	Mark's List	Luke's List
Simon (who is called Peter)	Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter)	Simon (whom he named Peter)
His (Peter's) brother Andrew	James son of Zebedee	His (Peter's) brother Andrew
James son of Zebedee	His (James') brother John	James
His (James') brother John	Andrew	John
Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew
Thomas	Matthew	Matthew
Matthew the tax collector	Thomas	Thomas
James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus
Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Simon who was called the Zealot
Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot	Judas son of James
Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him	Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him	Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor

Note that each list begins with Peter, who was considered the "head" apostle, and ends with Judas, the traitor. This is probably an indication that each author listed the disciples in an order equal to the "pecking order" that he perceived to exist in the group.

Each list includes Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot. Matthew and Mark list the twelfth disciple as Thaddaeus, whereas Luke names him as Judas the son of James. More than likely these were two names for the same individual (just as Matthew was also known as Levi or Simon was also known as Peter).

John never mentions James, John, Bartholomew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, or Matthew by name. The book of John often referred to "the disciple that Jesus loved," and this is assumed to be a modest way that John referred to himself. John does mention a disciple named Nathanael. Again, we assume this to be a second name for one of the twelve, although we do not know which one.

Interestingly enough, the Bible has very little to say about the majority of these men. Outside of the verses quoted above plus Acts 1:13 (which mentions all of the disciples except Judas Iscariot, gathered for prayer after the resurrection), the following references are made to these men:

Table 3 - References to Apostles

Simon Peter	Matthew (23 verses), Mark (21 verses), Luke (20 verses), John (31 verses), Acts (68 verses), 1 Corinthians (4 verses), Galatians (6 verses), 1 Peter (1 verse), 2 Peter (1 verse)
Andrew	Mark (2 verses), John (2 verses)
James	Matthew (1 verse), Mark (7 verses), Luke (3 verses), Acts (1 verse)
John	Matthew (1 verse), Mark (8 verses), Luke (5 verses), Acts (14 verses), Galatians (1 verse), Revelation (4 verses)

Philip	John (6 verses), Acts (14 verses, but they may refer to a different Philip)
Bartholomew	none
Thomas	John (7 verses)
Matthew	Luke (1 verse)
James son of Alphaeus	none
Thaddaeus/Judas the son of James	John (1 verse)
Simon the Zealot	none
Judas Iscariot	Matthew (7 verses), Mark (3 verses), Luke (4 verses), John (11 verses), Acts (3 verses)

John 21:2 does make one additional reference to Nathanael.

These twelve men were instrumental in changing the course of history. Unfortunately we have very little information about who they were, what they were like, why they were chosen by Jesus for the role, etc.

Curiously, the account of how they met as told by John seems to contradict that of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In fact, the accounts do not really disagree. They simply pick up the story at different points in time.

If one read only the accounts in the Synoptic Gospels, one might think that Jesus walked into Capernaum, met Peter, Andrew, James, and John for the first time, and told them "Follow me." Immediately, in an almost robotic response, without knowing who Jesus was or what he was about, they abandoned their families, their livelihoods, and their homes and became wanderers, following this itinerant preacher. Sometime later it would seem that Matthew did the same thing.

Reading the account in John and pulling it together with the information in the Synoptics, one gets a better understanding of what must have happened. Jesus began his preaching ministry before he ever had any disciples. He had already begun healing, casting out demons, etc. People were becoming aware of who he was. Andrew and John were followers of John the Baptist. True to his mission, John the Baptist pointed them to Jesus. They met Jesus and had a chance to get to know him. They introduced him to their brothers, Peter and James. Jesus built a relationship with all of these men over time. At the point when he told them "Follow me," they knew well who he was and were able to make a reasoned decision to become followers. And initially that is all they were – followers. Jesus had hundreds or thousands of followers. The time came when he knew he needed to focus his time and his energy on an inner core of men who would carry on his ministry after his death. The day came for him to select an inner circle. The Luke 6 passage tells us that he went off to pray all night about whom he would pick. After spending the night conversing with the Father, he selected the twelve that came to be known as the disciples or the apostles.

We know more about Peter than the other disciples. He was a fisherman by trade. He was a leader. He seemed to be the "head" apostle. After the resurrection, he seemed to be the rallying point for the other disciples. He preached the sermon at Pentecost that gave birth to the church. Eventually he seemed to have difficulty with some political bickering in the early church and it hurt his leadership. The torch passed to Paul as the leader of the church. Peter remained an effective servant to Jesus, however. Church tradition says that he was eventually crucified upside down in Rome by Nero.

Andrew's claim to fame is that he introduced Peter to Jesus. At times he seems to be included in the "inner inner" circle of Peter, James, and John, but not consistently. We know little else about him. Tradition says that Andrew also died by crucifixion.

Mark tells us that Jesus named James and John the "Sons of Thunder." One gets the impression that they were lively and energetic. Among the disciples, the inner circle seemed to consist of Peter, James, and John. They were certainly loved by Jesus and he relied on them to give leadership to the rest. Acts tells us that James was the first disciple that was martyred, being executed by Rome in the early days of the church. John is believed to be the author of the Gospel of John, the epistles 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John, and the Book of Revelation. John was ultimately exiled to the island of Patmos, where he had the vision and wrote Revelation. John may have been the only apostle who was not martyred. Before dying on the cross, Jesus charged John with taking care of Mary as if she were his own mother. John may have been closer to Philip and Thomas than some of the other disciples, because his is the only Gospel that records any of their activities. Tradition says that John ultimately settled and died in Ephesus.

Philip was with Jesus early on. According to John he was one of the very first disciples called by Jesus. Still, to the end he never really understood what was going on. When Jesus asked him how they might feed a multitude, Philip responded in terms of how much money it would cost rather than what Jesus was able to do. At the Last Supper, Philip was the one who asked Jesus to show them the Father. He received an almost exasperated response from Jesus, saying that anyone who has seen Jesus has seen the Father. We know little about Philip after the resurrection. There is a Philip mentioned repeatedly in Acts (he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch), but Acts 6:5 implies that it was a different Philip. Tradition says that the Apostle Philip was also crucified upside down.

Bartholomew is mentioned in the list of apostles in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but we know nothing else about him for sure. Many assume that he is the same man that John calls Nathanael, but there is no way of knowing for sure. Tradition says that he died a martyr's death by being tied up in a sack and thrown into the sea.

Thomas has the dubious distinction of being labeled "doubting Thomas." When Jesus originally appeared to the disciples after the resurrection, Thomas was not present. When they told him about Jesus' appearance, he said that he would not believe it "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side" (John 20:25). A week later, Jesus appeared again, this time with Thomas present. Jesus invited Thomas to touch his wounds. Thomas replied with the first declaration recorded in the Bible of the divinity of Jesus by a man, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Nothing is known for sure about the activities of Thomas after this event.

Matthew was the tax collector – a self-seeking servant of Rome and hated by his fellow Jews. He left all of that behind to follow Jesus and to become a disciple. Other than this significant act, we know little about Matthew. Apparently his name was originally Levi. It may have been changed to Matthew (meaning "gift from God") after he left his former life to follow Jesus. He is the source of the Gospel of Matthew. There are contradictory traditions about his life after the resurrection. Some accounts say he was martyred while others say he died a natural death.

The identity of James the son of Alphaeus has been debated for centuries. Some string together various verses from the Gospels and reach the conclusion that James the son of Alphaeus was a cousin of Jesus. Others conclude that this is the same James who wrote the epistle of James, although Protestants generally attribute that to a different James, the half-brother of Jesus. The fact is that we know little about this James, who he was or what he did after the resurrection.

The identity of Thaddaeus, also known as Judas son of James, has also been debated. Some suggest that he is the same Jude who wrote the epistle, but Protestants generally attribute that epistle as well to a half-brother of Jesus. We have no reliable information about who he was or what he did after the resurrection.

The Zealots were a faction among the Jews who sought a political overthrow of Rome. They looked for a Messiah to be the military and political leader who would bring this about. Simon the Zealot was a member of this party. It is ironic and fitting that Jesus would have included both a Zealot and a tax collector in his inner circle, for they were at opposite ends of the political spectrum. If Jesus could teach them to love one another then they would be a startling example to the rest of the world what a difference the love of God could make. Like several of the other disciples, we have very little information about Simon the Zealot.

Judas Iscariot is a well-known and villainous figure in the New Testament. John 12 tells us that Judas kept track of the funds for the disciples. When Mary anointed Jesus with the expensive perfume, Judas complained that the perfume could have been sold for a great deal of money and used for better purposes. John informs us that Judas had ulterior motives for saying this, because he used to steal from the ministry's funds. Judas is the one that ultimately betrayed Jesus to the Romans. Afterwards, he regretted what he had done and hanged himself.

When Jesus chose his disciples, he chose ordinary men. Some, such as Peter, were leaders. Others, such as Matthew, were hated by men. Some, like Matthew, were wealthy. Others probably had very little. They came from all strata of society. They came from different occupations, different education levels, different family situations. But they all had to make the choice to leave an old life behind and to follow Jesus without reserve. They had to decide to submit everything they had and everything they were to his Lordship. Jesus still chooses ordinary men. They come from every level of society, from every economic situation, from different life circumstances. They still have to make the choice to leave an old life behind and to follow Jesus without reserve. They still have to decide to submit everything that they have or that they are to his Lordship.

Jesus still chooses disciples.

5. Ministry of Jesus

Luke 3:23 tells us that Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his ministry. The Bible does not specify how old he was when he was crucified, but we deduce from the sequence of events in the Gospels that his ministry lasted around three years. If we follow the Markan sequence of events and add information from the other Gospels, then the following are the major events of his ministry following the initial invitation to Peter, Andrew, James, and John to "follow me." The order of the following events is somewhat speculation. Particularly where the events of John are co-mixed with events from the Synoptic Gospels, the ordering is highly questionable.

- At a wedding in Cana, Jesus turned water into wine. John indicates that it was his first miraculous sign and it instilled faith in his disciples. (John 2:1-12).
- He taught in the synagogue at Capernaum and cast a demon out of a man. (Mark 1:21-28) (Luke 4:31-37)
- He healed Peter's mother-in-law. (Matthew 8:14-22) (Mark 1:29-31) (Luke 4:38-39)
- Many came to Peter's house to be healed or to have demons cast out of them. Jesus ministered to them all. He would not allow demons to speak because they knew who he was. (Mark 1:32-33) (Luke 4:40-41)

- Jesus traveled to Jerusalem for Passover. When he arrived, he found vendors and moneychangers operating in the temple courts. He chased them out and turned over their tables. The leaders asked him to show a sign that he had the authority to do this. He told them "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days." (John 2:13-22)
- While in Jerusalem, Jesus performed various miracles. Many believed in him because of the signs that he was showing. John says that Jesus did not trust this sort of belief. He wanted followers who would flock to his truth, not to a miracle sideshow. (John 2:23-25)
- A high-ranking Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, named Nicodemus came for a meeting with Jesus. Jesus introduced the concept of being born again – telling him that his Abrahamic ancestry was not sufficient for him to enter the Kingdom of God. This conversation was the source of some of the most important verses of Scripture that we have, John 3:16-18: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." (John 3:1-21)
- Jesus traveled into the Judean countryside. His disciples were baptizing followers. The disciples of John the Baptist viewed the ministry of Jesus as a competition. They called the matter to John's attention. In John 3:30, John the Baptist replied, "He must become greater; I must become less." (John 3:22-4:3)
- Jesus was headed back to Galilee, but decided to cross through Samaria on the way – an unusual act for a good Jew. He had an encounter with a woman at a well in Samaria. In John 4:26, Jesus first revealed the fact that he was the Messiah to this Samaritan woman. This encounter so changed the life of the woman that the people in her town came to see who had brought about this change. Many believed in Jesus first because of the woman's testimony and subsequently because of the personal encounters that they had. (John 4:4-44)
- Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5-7) (Luke 6:17-49, 11:1-13, 12:22-31)
- He traveled about other villages in Galilee, preaching, healing, and casting out demons. While he was doing this, he healed a leper. He asked the leper not to tell people that he had done it, but to quietly follow Levitical law and present himself to a priest to be declared clean (see Leviticus 13). The man told everyone anyway and as a result the crowds hounded Jesus wherever he went. (Matthew 8:1-4) (Mark 1:34-45) (Luke 4:42-44, 5:12-16)
- From a distance, Jesus healed the servant of a Roman centurion (John indicates that it was the man's son). The Scripture says that he was astonished at the faith of this Gentile. (Matthew 8:5-13) (Luke 7:1-9) (John 4:46-54)
- Jesus raised from the dead the only son of a widow. (Luke 7:11-17)
- Jesus returned to the home of Peter. Crowds pressed in to hear him speak and to be present for ministry. Some men lowered a paralytic through Peter's roof so that Jesus could heal him. Jesus healed him and forgave his sin. Many considered it a blasphemous act for Jesus to forgive the man's sin. (Matthew 9:1-8) (Mark 2:1-12) (Luke 5:17-26)
- Jesus called Matthew the tax collector to be a disciple. He went to dinner in Matthew's home. Jesus was criticized for hanging out with undesirable people. He replied that he

came to reconcile the lost and not the righteous. (Matthew 9:9-17) (Mark 2:13-22) (Luke 5:27-39)

- Jesus and his disciples were hungry on the Sabbath and they picked some grain to eat. He was criticized for violating the Pharisee's concept of the Sabbath. He declared his Lordship over the Sabbath. (Matthew 12:1-8) (Mark 2:23-28) (Luke 6:1-5)
- Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were incensed again that he would knowingly violate their rules about the Sabbath. Mark 3:6 says an amazing thing – that the Pharisees and the Herodians began to work together to plot his death. That these two groups would work together is about as likely as the KKK planning a picnic with the NAACP. Somehow or other both of these groups viewed Jesus as enough of a threat that they would cooperate to rid themselves of a common enemy. Here, still fairly early in Jesus' ministry, people began plotting his death. (Matthew 12:9-21) (Mark 3:1-6) (Luke 6:6-11)
- Jesus continued his ministry of preaching, healing, and casting out demons. (Matthew 9:27-38) (Mark 3:7-12)
- Jesus appointed his twelve disciples. He made official his inner circle. (Matthew 10:1-4) (Mark 3:13-19) (Luke 6:12-16)
- Jesus returned to Jerusalem for another Jewish feast, possibly another Passover. While there he healed a paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda. The Jews accused him of impropriety for healing on the Sabbath – an act that they considered to be work and thus in violation of the law. In John 5:17, Jesus told them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." They were quick to pick up on the fact that he was calling God "My Father" and not "Our Father." Some began to plot his death because of the things that he said and did. In John 5:19, Jesus gave a formula for ministering in great power and also for being hated by men, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." Jesus used the opportunity to declare boldly and publicly who he was and why he had come. (John 5:1-47)
- Some teachers from Jerusalem came and accused Jesus of being out of his mind. They said that the only way he was able to drive out demons was under the power of Satan. Jesus replied that Satan would not work against himself. Jesus' mother and brothers also came and tried to take charge of him because they, too believed that he was out of his mind. He replied that those who followed his teachings were his mother and brothers. (Matthew 12:22-37, 12:46-50) (Mark 3:20-35) (Luke 8:19-21)
- Jesus began the practice of teaching the crowds in parables. He was always careful to explain the parables to the disciples, however. Theirs was the task of carrying the ministry forward after the resurrection and Jesus took time and care to make sure that they properly understood everything he said. (Matthew 13:1-52) (Mark 4:1-34) (Luke 8:1-18, Luke 12:16-48, 14:7-15, 15:1-17:10, 19:11-27)
- Jesus and the disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was asleep when a storm suddenly arose. The disciples were frightened and they awoke Jesus. He rebuked the storm and calm fell immediately. (Matthew 8:23-27) (Mark 4:35-41) (Luke 8:22-25)
- Jesus cast a legion of demons out of a man (Matthew says it was two men) and into a herd of pigs. The pigs rushed into the sea and drowned. The people of the area were afraid and they asked Jesus to leave. The man that had been healed wanted to go with Jesus, but

Jesus encouraged him to remain behind and tell people what the Lord had done for him. (Matthew 8:28-34) (Mark 5:1-20) (Luke 8:26-39)

- A woman who had suffered from a bleeding sore for twelve years touched the hem of Jesus' garment and was healed because of her faith. (Matthew 9:18-22) (Mark 5:21-34) (Luke 8:40-48)
- Jesus raised from the dead the daughter of a man named Jairus. He cautioned those who knew about the event not to tell people what he had done. (Matthew 9:23-26) (Mark 5:35-43) (Luke 8:49-56)
- Jesus went back to Nazareth. There he tried to minister as he had other places, but the hometown folks did not accept him. Because of their lack of faith he was unable to do very much in the way of healing or other miracles. (Matthew 13:53-58) (Mark 6:1-6)
- Jesus organized his disciples into teams of two and sent them out to minister. He anointed them to preach and to heal and to cast out demons, just as he had been showing them how to do. They went out and ministered and called people to repentance. (Matthew 10:5-42) (Mark 6:7-13) (Luke 9:1-6)
- From prison, John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus asking him whether or not he was the Messiah. Jesus sent back word that the blind were receiving sight, the lepers cured, the deaf hearing, the dead being raised, and the good news was being preached to the poor. He was referring to Isaiah 61:1-2. The words of the prophecy were being fulfilled. After the messengers went back to John, Jesus explained that John had been the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1, "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come." He tells them that John was the last prophet of the Old Covenant. He grieved over the fact that the world did not accept either John or Jesus. He pronounced woe over the cities where he had performed miracles but the people had not repented. (Matthew 11:1-29) (Luke 7:18-35)
- Jesus was having dinner at the home of a Pharisee named Simon. A woman came in and anointed him with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair. Jesus was criticized for allowing a "sinful woman" to touch him. Jesus replied that she had attended him better than Simon had done and that her attention was motivated by the forgiveness that she needed. He forgave her sins. The people present began to criticize him for assuming that he had the right to forgive sin. (Luke 7:36-50)
- Jesus' ministry was becoming quite well known. Herod Antipas wondered if Jesus was John the Baptist, somehow having come back to life. This section tells about the death of John the Baptist. (Matthew 14:1-14) (Mark 6:14-29) (Luke 9:7-8)
- The disciples returned from their ministry trip, anxious to share their experiences. Jesus wanted to get alone with them for a time but the crowds pressed in. He took them to a remote place, but the crowds followed. Jesus took compassion on them and taught them and ministered to them. It became late in the day and the people were hungry. Because they were in a remote place, there was no place to get food. Jesus took a few loaves and a few fishes and fed five thousand men, plus their wives and children. There were twelve baskets full of food left over after the meal. (Matthew 14:15-21) (Mark 6:30-44) (Luke 9:10-17) (John 6:1-15)

- Jesus sent the disciples out on the Sea of Galilee by themselves and he spent time alone praying. In the middle of the night, he walked out onto the Sea of Galilee and joined the disciples in the boat. (Matthew 14:22-33) (Mark 6:45-52) (John 6:16-21)
- Jesus gathered a larger and larger following. People followed him everywhere, waiting to hear him teach and hoping to benefit from his miraculous ministry. Some came looking for more food. Jesus used that opportunity to tell them that he came to bring the "bread of life" rather than bread for the stomach. (Matthew 14:34-36) (Mark 6:53-56) (John 6:22-71)
- Some Pharisees criticized Jesus for not following the traditions surrounding ceremonial cleanliness. Jesus lambasted the Pharisees for following whatever traditions they want and setting aside those that they did not like. He also stated that it is not what goes in a person's mouth that makes him unclean; it is what comes out, i.e. in the sight of God, it what a person says or does that makes him unclean, not what he eats. (Matthew 15:1-20) (Mark 7:1-23) (Luke 11:37-12:15)
- Jesus cast a demon out of the daughter of a Gentile woman. He healed a deaf mute man. (Matthew 15:21-31) (Mark 7:24-37)
- Jesus did another miraculous feeding, this time of four thousand men plus their wives and children. (Matthew 15:32-39) (Mark 8:1-10)
- The Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign that he was the Messiah but he would not give it to them. He said that the only sign that they would get would be the sign of Jonah, referring to his own death and resurrection. (Matthew 12:38-45) (Matthew 16:1-12) (Mark 8:11-21) (Luke 11:14-36)
- Jesus prayed for healing for a blind man. His vision was improved but not restored completely. Jesus prayed again and his vision was completely restored. (Mark 8:22-26)
- Jesus and his disciples were at Caesarea Philippi. He asked his disciples who people said that he was. He then asked them who they thought Jesus was. Peter replied, "You are the Christ." Jesus proceeded to tell his disciples that they would be going to Jerusalem and that Jesus would be arrested and executed. Peter objected. Jesus said to him, "Get behind me Satan." He reminded them that being a disciple means denying oneself, taking up one's cross, and following Jesus. (Matthew 16:13-28) (Mark 8:27-9:1) (Luke 9:18-27)
- Jesus was on a mountain with Peter, James, and John. Suddenly he became transfigured. He was dressed in startlingly white clothes and his presence glowed. Moses and Elijah appeared with him. The disciples did not know exactly what to make of this. Peter offered to build three shelters so that this little crowd of people could enjoy this presence forever. As suddenly as it all had come, it was gone. Moses and Elijah were gone and Jesus ceased to glow. Unfortunately too many of us are like Peter. When we see the presence of God glowing, we want to build walls around it and keep it in rather than sharing it with the world around us who need this presence so much. (Matthew 17:1-13) (Mark 9:2-13) (Luke 9:28-36)
- After coming down from the mountain after the transfiguration, Jesus found that his disciples were attempting to minister to a boy who was heavily oppressed by a demon. They were unable to drive out the demon. Jesus cast out the demon. When his disciples asked him why they had been unable to do so, he told them that "This kind can come out only by prayer." (Matthew 17:14-20) (Mark 9:14-29) (Luke 9:37-43)
- Jesus spent some time alone with his disciples and told them that he would be betrayed and killed but would rise again on the third day. (Matthew 22-23) (Mark 9:30-32) (Luke 9:44-45)

- Jesus instructed Peter to throw a line into the Sea of Galilee. The first fish he caught would have a coin in its mouth. Peter took the coin and used it to pay the temple tax. (Matthew 17:24-27)
- Jesus discovered that his disciples had been arguing about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. He used the opportunity to explain that the least would be the greatest and the greatest would be the least. If you want to be great in the Kingdom, be a servant. (Matthew 18:1-4) (Mark 9:33-37) (Luke 9:46-48)
- Jesus taught the disciples on the importance of forgiveness, of leading others into the Kingdom, of repentance. He told them of the Father's heart for the lost. He taught them about the power of prayer. (Matthew 18:5-35)
- The disciples told Jesus that they had found a man casting out demons in the name of Jesus. They stopped him because he was not "one of them." Jesus told them not to stop anyone ministering in the name of Jesus. Anyone who was not against them was for them. He told them that they were to encourage people to come to Jesus rather than turn people away. There would be judgment for any man who caused people to turn away from Jesus. (Mark 9:38-50) (Luke 9:49-50)
- Jesus taught on divorce. (Matthew 19:1-12) (Mark 10:1-12) (Luke 16:18)
- Parents brought children to Jesus to be blessed. The disciples tried to turn them away, believing Jesus to be too busy. Jesus insisted that the Kingdom was for children and for those with child-like innocence. He blessed the children. (Matthew 19:13-15) (Mark 10:13-16) (Luke 18:15-17)
- Jesus taught on the cost of discipleship. (Matthew 19:16-20:16) (Mark 10:17-31) (Luke 9:51-62, 10:25-27, 12:49-13:9, 13:20-30, 14:16-35, 18:18-30)
- Jesus was criticized for healing on the Sabbath. (Luke 13:10-17, 14:1-6)
- Jesus organized seventy-two of his followers into teams of two and sent them out to minister. They came back very enthusiastic, having discovered that even the demons would submit to them in the name of Jesus. Jesus told them that he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. He told them that they should rejoice not that the spirits submitted to them, but that their names were written in heaven. (Luke 10:1-24)
- Jesus spent time in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Mary wanted to listen to Jesus speak but Martha was busy fixing dinner. She complained to Jesus that Mary would not help, but Jesus told her that Mary had chosen the more important activity. (Luke 10:38-42)
- Jesus healed ten lepers. Only one returned to thank him. (Luke 17:11-19)
- Jesus taught on the coming of the Kingdom of God. (Luke 17:20-18:14)
- Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. While he was there, he taught publicly. His teaching caused many to believe in him, but angered the leaders of the Jews even more. (John 7:1-52)
- While Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, a woman who had been caught in adultery was brought to him for judgment. This was the setting for his statement, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." (John 7:53-8:11)

- Jesus continued teaching in Jerusalem. He gave his "I am the light of the world" discourse. Many believed in him. Others accused him of being demon-possessed. (John 8:12-59)
- In Jerusalem, Jesus healed a man who had been born blind. (John 9:1-41)
- Jesus continued teaching in Jerusalem. He gave his "good shepherd" discourse. (John 10:1-21)
- Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah). He taught very boldly, which incensed the Pharisees even more. Some tried to kill him but Jesus escaped them. He left Jerusalem and went across the Jordan. (John 10:22-42)
- Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, died. Jesus came to Bethany three days after he had died and Jesus raised him from the dead. It was a tremendous and very public miracle. Many more believed in him as a result, but also as a result the Pharisees became more and more resolved to put him to death. Caiaphas, the high priest, said, "You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." Because of the severe threat on his life, Jesus withdrew from the area. (John 11:1-54)
- Again Jesus told his disciples what was going to happen in Jerusalem. He said he would be betrayed, condemned, mocked, spit upon, flogged, and killed. Then in three days he would rise again. (Matthew 20:17-19) (Mark 10:32-34) (Luke 13:31-35, 18:29-34)
- James and John asked Jesus if they could sit on his right and left when he came into his glory. He explained to them that the cost of such a position was heavy. He also said that the decision about who sat in those positions was not his to make. The other disciples found out what they had asked and were mad about it. Jesus reminded them that the first would be last and the last first. The greatest in the Kingdom would be the servant. (Matthew 20:20-28) (Mark 10:35-45)
- Jesus headed to Jerusalem for the final time. He went for the Passover celebration. (John 11:55-57)
- As Jesus left Jericho to travel to Jerusalem, he healed a blind man named Bartimaeus. (Matthew says that two men were healed.) (Matthew 20:29-34) (Mark 10:46-52) (Luke 18:35-43)
- Jesus ate in the home of a tax collector named Zacchaeus, who then repented of his ways. (Luke 19:1-10)
- On the Sabbath before the Passover (six days before Passover), Jesus stopped at Bethany at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. During dinner, Mary anointed Jesus with expensive perfume. Judas objected and said that the perfume could have been sold and the money used to feed the poor. John tells us that Judas was not motivated out of concern for the poor, but that he kept the ministry's funds and helped himself freely to the money. Jesus informed Judas that Mary was preparing Jesus for his burial. (Note that the Synoptic Gospels place this event during the Passion Week rather than the night before it began.) (Matthew 26:6-13) (Mark 14:3-9) (John 12:1-11)

6. Passion Week

Passion Week begins with the day that we call Palm Sunday. The Sabbath was over. It was time for Jesus to enter Jerusalem and to deal with the events of his final week. Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-14, Luke 19:28-44, and John 12:12-19 all describe the event known as the "Triumphal Entry."

The events of this week fulfilled volumes of Old Testament Scripture. Zechariah 9:9 had told the people:

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!
Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and having salvation,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Psalm 118:19-29 says:

Open for me the gates of righteousness;
I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.
This is the gate of the Lord
through which the righteous may enter.
I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.
The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
O Lord, save us;
O Lord, grant us success.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
From the house of the Lord we bless you.
The Lord is God,
and he has made his light shine upon us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.
You are my God, and I will give you thanks;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

Note that "Hosanna" is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew "O Lord, save us" found in Psalm 118:25. God had set the stage for these events through the words of Zechariah and David. Then on Palm Sunday they came about. Mark 11:4-11 describes the event:

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road,

while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest!”

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

The long-awaited Davidic king, righteous and having salvation, came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. As he did, the people shouted the words of Psalm 118:25-26, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" As the words of the Psalm described, they cut boughs from the trees and laid them in the streets before the coming king. They joined in the festal procession. And where did the procession lead? To the horns of the altar. Jesus went to the temple.

His approach to the temple was significant. Ezekiel 11:1, 16-24 says:

Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the gate of the house of the Lord that faces east...

Therefore say: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'Although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone.'"

Therefore say: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again.'"

They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose hearts are devoted to their vile images and detestable idols, I will bring down on their own heads what they have done, declares the Sovereign Lord.

Then the cherubim, with the wheels beside them, spread their wings, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. The glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the exiles in Babylonia in the vision given by the Spirit of God.

Around 600 years prior to Palm Sunday, Ezekiel had a vision. He sat at the eastern gate of the city and saw the Spirit of God lift from the temple and abandon the city, exiting to the east, over the Mount of Olives. On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode on the road from Bethany to Jerusalem, which comes from the east, passing over the Mount of Olives. He entered the city through the eastern gate and went to the temple. God Incarnate came back into the city through the same path that the God the Spirit used to leave the city years before.

Jesus entered Jerusalem as a celebrity. The reception that the crowd gave him indicated that he was well known and popular. Jesus instilled some sort of hope in them. They looked to him as a leader who would give them deliverance. Unfortunately, the deliverance that they anticipated seemed to be more political than spiritual. As the events of the week unfold, we see how fleeting their devotion was.

According to Mark, after his triumphal entry that Sunday, he visited the temple and then returned to Bethany. There he spent the night. The next day he returned to Jerusalem. (Note that Bethany was a very short distance from Jerusalem. Today we would call it a suburb. The distance that he had to travel was probably around 2-3 miles.) Mark 11:15-18 describes the events of the next day.

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written:

'My house will be called
a house of prayer for all nations'?

But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

In John we saw Jesus clear the temple area early in his ministry. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell of a temple clearing during the Passion Week. It may have happened twice, but the reader should remember that chronology is something that we typically impose upon the Gospels rather than something that they claim for themselves. There seems to be good evidence that this did take place on the day after Palm Sunday.

The temple referenced here was Herod's temple complex. It was a massive structure. At the heart of it was the actual temple. This was a permanent building serving the same purpose as did the tabernacle during the years of wandering in the wilderness. The innermost place of the temple was the Holy of Holies, the resting-place of the Ark of the Covenant and the location of the judgment seat of God. The high priest entered this chamber once each year on the Day of Atonement. A heavy veil separated it from the Holy Place.

The Holy Place was the location of the Altar of Incense, the Lampstand, and the Table of Shewbread. The priests serviced this area daily. It was here that Zechariah the priest was informed of the birth of John the Baptist.

Outside the Holy Place was the burnt altar, where the sacrifices were made. Male Jews could come into this area to make sacrifices for their families. Further out was the Court of the Women, where women could come into the temple complex and worship. The outermost court was the Court of the Gentiles. Gentiles were not allowed into the inner courts, but an outer court was provided so that they could come and pray and gain some physical proximity to the abiding place of God.

It was in the Court of the Gentiles that the buying and selling took place. Note that the vendors were there for a practical purpose and that there was nothing inherently wrong with providing this service. People came from great distances to make offerings at the temple. It was much easier to buy an animal to sacrifice after arriving in Jerusalem than to bring it along on the trip.

Furthermore, once there a temple tax needed to be paid – in the proper currency. It was helpful to travelers to be able to arrange all of this after arriving in Jerusalem.

But if this was a legitimate and even helpful business, then why did Jesus angrily chase them from the temple? Some have speculated that Jesus was upset because the vendors were charging exorbitant prices for their goods. More than likely they were. That is probably why Jesus used the term "den of robbers." Still, that does not seem to be the real issue. The problem is that they were operating in the Court of the Gentiles.

The Jews were God's chosen people. They were chosen for a purpose. They were to be a nation of priests, reconciling the rest of the world to God. Their purpose was to be his fragrance in the earth and to draw people to him. Historically they had failed miserably at that task. When the temple was built, the Court of the Gentiles was included in fulfillment of that purpose. It was being profaned, however. This one bit of real estate, which had been set aside in obedience to their whole reason for existence, was being turned into a flea market. So Jesus was upset and he drove them out.

His actions were embarrassing to the leaders of the Jews. They knew that what he did was right. They knew that they had no business allowing the vendors in the Court of the Gentiles. More than likely, they were getting a commission from the business going on there and profiting personally from the mayhem. When Jesus took authority of the situation, their own authority and their integrity was challenged. It was personal. It was not an issue of right or wrong. It was a matter of "who does he think he is?"

And so, as Mark says, "the chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him." Surely they did not realize it, but that day they selected Jesus to be the lamb that would be sacrificed on Passover.

The timing of this incident was significant. Mark's chronology indicates that it happened on Monday, the day after Palm Sunday. Exodus 12:1-11 says:

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year – old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire – head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.

The Passover celebration was an annual commemoration of this event. On that night, God brought about the miracle that gave his people freedom from bondage and allowed them to begin their journey to the Promised Land. That liberation came at the price of death, but the faithful received life through the substitutionary death of a sacrificial lamb.

The Passover celebration occurred on the fourteenth day of the month – remembering that days are reckoned from sundown to sundown. During Passion Week, that would have been sundown

Thursday to sundown Friday. According to Exodus 12:3 (above), the lamb that was to be sacrificed was to be chosen on the tenth day of the month. Counting backwards we see:

14th	Sundown Thursday - Sundown Friday
13th	Sundown Wednesday - Sundown Thursday
12th	Sundown Tuesday - Sundown Wednesday
11th	Sundown Monday - Sundown Tuesday
10th	Sundown Sunday - Sundown Monday

According to Mosaic Law, the sacrificial lamb of the Passover was to be selected on Monday. This is the day that the chief priests and the teachers of the law put together the final plot that would nail Jesus to the cross. Jesus would become the blood sacrifice. His substitutionary death would bring life to all who would put their faith in him. It was the event that would bring people out of bondage and allow them to start their journey into the Promised Land.

We gather from the text that Saturday through Wednesday Jesus spent the night in Bethany and Sunday through Thursday he went into Jerusalem to teach and to minister. The different Gospels record different events that occurred during this week. Much of week was spent in confrontational exchanges with the Jewish leadership. Events that occurred after the clearing of the temple and before the Last Supper include:

- Jesus and the disciples passed a fig tree. They were hungry. The tree was barren. Jesus cursed the tree and it withered. Jesus used the situation to teach his disciples about praying in faith and seeing results. (Matthew 21:17-22) (Mark 11:12-14, 20-25).
- The Jewish leaders asked Jesus where he got the authority to do the things he did (probably referring to the cleansing of the temple). He told them he would answer their question only if they would tell him whether or not John the Baptist received his authority from heaven. This was a no-win question for them. If they said that John was a prophet from heaven, then Jesus would confront them for not following him. If they said he was not, they would have trouble with the people because John was widely viewed as a prophet by the masses. They would not answer Jesus' question so he would not answer theirs. (Matthew 21:23-27) (Mark 11:27-33).
- Jesus told the parable of the vineyard and the unfaithful tenants. This was aimed squarely at the Jewish leaders. (Matthew 21:28-46) (Mark 12:1-12)
- Jesus told the parable of the wedding banquet, symbolic of the fact that he had come for the Jews but they rejected him. As a result, Gentiles would be brought into the Kingdom. (Matthew 22:1-14)
- Some people tried to trap Jesus by asking him about paying taxes to Rome. Remember that many people were looking for a political Messiah. They asked him whether or not God's people should pay taxes to Rome. If Jesus said to pay the taxes, then they anticipated that he would lose much of his support. If he said not to pay the taxes, they could have had him arrested for insurrection. Jesus handled the situation perfectly. He asked to see a coin. He then asked whose image was on the coin. The answer was "Caesar." Jesus said to render to Caesar what was Caesar's and to God what was God's. (Matthew 22:15-22) (Mark 12:13-17)
- Next the Sadducees tried to trick Jesus. The Sadducees were a faction among the Jews who did not believe in a resurrection – life after death. They posed a question to Jesus concerning what might happen to a woman who had been married to multiple men. The background of the question is Deuteronomy 25:5-6: "If brothers are living together and one of

them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel." They told Jesus to suppose that a woman married, was widowed, married the first man's brother, was widowed again, etc., until she had married each of seven brothers. Their question was, "When she ultimately died, whose wife would she be?"

Jesus looked beyond their question and saw their motive. They did not believe in the resurrection and thus their question was not sincere. They thought they had given Jesus a question that he could not answer and that his inability to answer would prove their point. Jesus answered that in the resurrection marriage would not be an issue. He also addressed their ignorance concerning life after death. He said that if they knew their Scriptures they would know that God is the God of the living and not the dead. He pointed out that when God first appeared to Moses, he introduced himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, implying that those three were still very much alive. (Matthew 22:23-33) (Mark 12:18-27)

- A man asked Jesus which was the most important commandment. Jesus' reply is found in Mark 12:29-31.

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

In these brief two statements we find all of Scripture rolled into an easy-to-understand-and-remember summary. God's standards for us are that we be rightly related to him and to one another. It may be easy to understand and to remember, but sometimes it seems so hard for us to do. The reason? Because it is other-focused rather than "me" focused. (Matthew 22:34-39) (Mark 12:28-34)

- Jesus taught on the worthlessness of leaders who thought highly of themselves. God looks for devotion motivated out of humility. (Matthew 22:41-23:39) (Mark 12:35-44)
- Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple. (Matthew 24:1-2) (Mark 13:1-2)
- Jesus taught on the conditions that would prevail on the earth right before the final judgment and what would happen at the time of the judgment. (Matthew 24:3-25:46) (Mark 13:3-37)
- Jesus told his disciples one more time that he would be killed. (Matthew 26:1-2)
- Judas made a pact with those who were plotting to kill Jesus. He agreed to betray Jesus into their hands, for a price. (Matthew 26:3-16) (Mark 14:1-11)
- Jesus had his disciples go and prepare the room for the observance of the Passover Feast. This is the event that would come to be known as the Last Supper. (Matthew 26:17-19) (Mark 14:12-16)

6.1 The Last Supper

Matthew 26:20-46, Mark 14:17-42, Luke 22:14-46, John 13:1-18:1

We have four accounts of the Last Supper. The accounts of Matthew and Mark are almost identical. Luke's account is very similar to that of Matthew and Mark. John's account gives the

most information by far. Matthew devotes 27 verses to the account, Mark 26 verses, and Luke 33 verses. John takes 5 chapters to describe the Last Supper. Still, even though the Synoptic accounts are shorter, they give us information not found in John.

An outline of the events of the Last Supper is described in the following table:

Table 4 - The Last Supper

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
			Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, setting an example for them of how they are to serve one another.
Jesus told his disciples that one of them would betray him.	Jesus told his disciples that one of them would betray him.		Jesus told his disciples that one of them would betray him.
Jesus identified Judas as the one who would betray him.			Jesus identified Judas as the one who would betray him.
			Jesus told Judas to go ahead and take care of things quickly. Judas left the meal.
Jesus broke the bread and gave it to the disciples, telling them that it was his body. He gave them the cup and told them that it was his blood.	Jesus broke the bread and gave it to the disciples, telling them that it was his body. He gave them the cup and told them that it was his blood.	Jesus broke the bread and gave it to the disciples, telling them that it was his body. He gave them the cup and told them that it was his blood.	
		Jesus told his disciples that one of them would betray him.	
		The disciples argued about who among them would be the greatest in the Kingdom. Jesus told them that the one who wanted to be the greatest should be a servant.	
		Jesus said that Satan had asked to sift Peter but that Jesus had prayed that Peter would be strong.	
		Peter declared his allegiance to Jesus, but Jesus said that	

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
		Peter would deny him three times that night before the rooster crowed.	
		Jesus warned the disciples that the time was coming very soon when they would need to guard themselves physically because they would come under threat and persecution. Their lives were getting ready to change.	
			Jesus told the disciples that he was about to go away and that they were to love one another once he was gone.
			The disciples wanted to know where Jesus was going. Peter claimed that he would never leave Jesus. Jesus informed Peter that he would deny Jesus three times that night before the rooster crowed.
			Jesus sensed that the disciples were upset at the fact that he said that he was going away. He told them not to worry. He said that there are many mansions in his Father's house and that he was going to prepare a place for them. He would come again to get them. Thomas indicated that they did not know the way to the Father. Jesus replied that He was the way and the truth and the life, and that no man comes to the Father but through

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
			him.
			Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus said that anyone who had seen him had seen the Father.
			Jesus taught on the Holy Spirit.
			Again Jesus told his disciples to follow his example and to obey his instructions.
They sang a hymn.	They sang a hymn.		
			They left the upper room.
			Jesus taught on the vine and the branches.
			Jesus reemphasizes to the disciples the importance of loving one another. He tells them that they will be hated by the world.
			Jesus teaches further on the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
			The disciples were confused because they did not understand where Jesus was going. Jesus told them that their grief will turn to joy.
			Jesus told them that they would be scattered.
			Jesus prayed the high priestly prayer.
They went to the Mount of Olives.	They went to the Mount of Olives.	They went to the Mount of Olives.	They arrived at the Mount of Olives
Jesus told the disciples that they would all fall away and be scattered. Peter claimed that he would never leave Jesus. Jesus informed Peter that he would deny Jesus	Jesus told the disciples that they would all fall away and be scattered. Peter claimed that he would never leave Jesus. Jesus informed Peter that he would deny Jesus		

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
three times that night before the rooster crowed.	three times that night before the rooster crowed.		
They went to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives.	They went to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives.		
Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went off to pray.	Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went off to pray.	Jesus encouraged the disciples to pray that they might not fall into temptation. He went off by himself a short distance from them so that he might pray.	
Jesus prayed that the cup might be taken from him, but was willing to submit to the Father's will.	Jesus prayed that the cup might be taken from him, but was willing to submit to the Father's will.	Jesus prayed that the cup might be taken from him, but was willing to submit to the Father's will.	
		An angel came and ministered to Jesus. He prayed so fervently and with such passion and anguish that his sweat fell like drops of blood.	
He returned from praying to find Peter, James, and John asleep. He asked them to watch and pray while he went off to pray again.	He returned from praying to find Peter, James, and John asleep. He asked them to watch and pray while he went off to pray		
Again Jesus prayed that the cup might be taken from him, but above all that the Father's will be done.	Jesus prayed the same thing a second time.		
Jesus returned again and found the three asleep.	Jesus returned again and found the three asleep.		
He went back and prayed the same thing a third time.	He went back and prayed the same thing a third time.		
He returned and woke up the disciples and told them that the time had come for him to be betrayed.	He returned and woke up the disciples and told them that the time had come for him to be betrayed.	Jesus returned from praying and found the disciples sleeping. He woke them and again encouraged them to pray that the might not fall into	

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
		temptation. Then he informed them that the time had come for him to be betrayed.	

The ordinance of the Lord's Supper, Communion, the Eucharist (or whatever name one wants to call it) commemorates this event. Unfortunately the manner in which this is observed has been a dividing point among Christians for centuries. Christians have been divided on issues including who can participate in communion, who can administer communion, how often it should be observed, the significance to the participant, the meaning of "this is my body" and "this is my blood," etc.

Why did the church begin to observe communion? We have no record of a time when Jesus clearly instructed the church to do so. The closest thing that we have is Luke 22:18-20:

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

Were the words "do this in remembrance of me" a command to begin regularly observing this ordinance? Perhaps, but it is not clear. We do know that the church in the first century regularly observed communion. We know that even then there was controversy about the manner in which it should be observed. Paul devoted much of 1 Corinthians Chapter 11 to correcting some of the practices in the Corinthian church surrounding the observance of communion. One gathers from that passage that communion had been turned into a drunken covered-dish supper. Paul was attempting to rectify that and to turn it into a more orderly and meaningful event. The words of this chapter, however, give us the best instructions that we have regarding the observance of communion. 1 Corinthians 11:23-31 say:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.

The time when we observe the Lord's Supper is to be a time of introspection. It is a time when we are to come to grips with our sin and the price that was paid for them. It is a time of reverence and awe. Taking communion without first being right with God can bring judgment, sickness, or even death upon a man. For this reason, most churches restrict communion to believers only. Many handle this by simply instructing the congregation at the time of communion that it is an ordinance only for professing Christians, leaving it to the individuals in the congregation to comply. Other churches take it to the extreme and have "closed communion," offering it only to members of their own churches. These churches believe that it

is the church's responsibility to prevent anyone from coming under judgment by wrongly taking communion.

The biggest issue that has divided the church surrounding communion is that of the substance of the bread and the wine (or grape juice). As Jesus offered the bread to the disciples, he said "this is my body." As he offered the wine he said "this is my blood." Some churches (e.g. Catholic) believe that when the priest blesses the bread and wine for communion, they physically become the body and blood of Jesus. Others (e.g. most, but not all Protestant) believe that the bread is a symbol for the body of Christ and the wine is a symbol of his blood. Still others take some stance in the middle, saying that the bread and wine take on the essence of the body and blood of Jesus. Those who believe that the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Jesus have a high reverence for the elements of communion. If they are not completely consumed during the observance, the leftovers are carefully guarded until the next time, when they will be used again. These are typically the people who believe that only a priest can administer communion, because only someone of that stature should handle something so sacred as the body and blood of Jesus.

One has to ask, "Are they right?" Jesus did say "this is my body" and "this is my blood." One has to remember, however, that this is the same man who said "You are the salt of the earth," and "I am the vine; you are the branches." Many people understand these words of Jesus to be symbolic. Just as Jesus broke bread for the benefit of his disciples, the next day his body would be broken for their benefit. Just as he poured wine for their benefit, the next day his blood would be poured out for their benefit. Jesus was a master teacher and often sought to teach spiritual truths through every-day object lessons. That is what the parables were all about. At the Last Supper, Jesus sought to tie the remembrance of his sacrifice to the every-day event of eating and drinking. How changed we would be if we truly remembered the sacrifice of Jesus every time we eat and drink.

So what about all of these questions?

Do the bread and wine change into the body and blood or not? The church has not been able to reach consensus on this in two thousand years. I do not think that they will look to me to settle the issue. I believe the words to be symbolic.

Who has to administer communion? If you hold to the belief that the elements change substance, then it makes sense that communion would be administered by clergy. If you do not hold to that viewpoint, then communion does not need to be administered by anyone. It simply needs to be observed. That could happen in a church with a robed minister passing out the elements or it could happen gathered around a table at home.

Who should participate? Believers who have undergone introspection and are repentant.

How often should it be observed? There is no guideline in Scripture. More than likely the early church did it weekly (but Paul did not hold up the early church to us as a model for how to observe communion.)

Communion is a New Testament version of the Fellowship Offering of the Old Testament. Remember that the first seven chapters of Leviticus prescribed several different sorts of offerings that the people were to make. A sin or guilt offering was to make atonement for sin. It involved a blood sacrifice of an animal without defect. Once atonement had been made for sin, one could optionally make a fellowship offering. In this, one would sit down at a banquet table and share a meal with the Lord. Part of the offering would be burnt on the altar and the other part consumed by the participant. It celebrated the fact that relationship with God had been restored once the sin had been removed. To Christians, Jesus was the sacrifice without blemish

that made atonement for our sin. Our relationship with the Father is restored. This is why we can sit down with him at a banquet table and have communion. It should be a time of tremendous joy for us but also a time when we reverently and repentantly consider the price that was paid for our sin. It should be a time of total awe mixed with unbridled joy.

Some rather amazing teaching occurred at the Last Supper. It all began in John Chapter 13 with the footwashing. This is a practice that is uncommon today, but was part of everyday life in the first century. For the ordinary person, travel was normally by foot. Feet got hot, tired, and dusty. When a host gave a party, he would normally provide a footwashing service for his guests, but it would be performed by the lowest ranking servant that he had. Jesus used that fact to demonstrate to his disciples in a very graphic and humbling way a truth that he had tried to instill in them all along – that his Kingdom was a Kingdom of servants. The one who would be greatest in the Kingdom was the one who bent down lowest to serve the most. Peter was troubled by this display – that his master should be washing his feet. Jesus told Peter that if he was to be part of the Kingdom then he must accept Jesus' service to him. Then having received that service, he must turn around and serve others.

That principle is still true. One only enters the Kingdom by accepting the gift of service provided by Jesus. There is no other way in. Once there, we have an obligation to turn around and serve others. We get so that we can give.

Thus, on what was perhaps the most significant night of his life, the climax of his ministry on earth, Jesus assumed the role of the lowliest of servants and humbly ministered to his disciples. They really did not get it. According to Luke 22, later that night the disciples argued among themselves about who would be the considered the greatest. Jesus again instructed them that the least would be the greatest and that the one who serves is greater than the one who is served.

After the footwashing, Jesus tried to explain to the disciples what would be happening that night. He told them that he was going away and that they could not follow. They were troubled by this, for obvious reasons. In an effort to calm some of their fears, Jesus spoke some of the greatest promises that we have in all of Scripture. John 14:1-7:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

Jesus was going back to be with the Father, the Creator of the universe. Once he got there, he was going to prepare a place for each of his followers so that they could live with the Father for eternity. He would come again so that he could receive those followers and bring them to the Father. He is the way and the only way to get to the Father. In fact, his relationship with the Father is so intimate that anyone who has seen Jesus has seen the Father.

Wow.

This is the promise that instills hope in believers. There is more to existence than this life. There will be a time when we will be ushered into the Father's presence to dwell with him for eternity. There will be a time when Jesus will return and will take believers away to be with him in his Father's house.

That is our future hope. Still, we must cope with the present. In the immediate future, Jesus was going away and his disciples would be left quite in need of nurturing and support. Jesus cared about that as well. His focus was not strictly on the future hope. He cared about the now. Thus he spend a great deal of time that night instructing the disciples on the importance of loving one another. After Jesus left, their only support group would be each other. It was critical that they were sensitive to that. If they did not manifest agape love for one another then everything that he had built among them would wither and die. That is still true.

The New Testament mandate for believers to love and to care for one another runs throughout all twenty-seven books. It is a major theme in the writings of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. It is a concept that runs back deep into the Old Testament as well. God's commandments and his law had two themes: devotion to God and caring for one another. Even the Ten Commandments had a set of instructions about how to relate to God followed by a set of instructions about how to relate to fellow man. God cares about how we treat each other; he always has. Perhaps this particular night in history brings into focus why that is so important.

The disciples were about to enter into a great test of faith. Their leader would be arrested and executed. They themselves would be the target of persecution. They desperately needed each other. Christians still desperately need each other. We live in a world that is hostile to the things taught and modeled by our Lord. We need the love and support of fellow believers to encourage us to stay true to his teachings. Otherwise most of us would be absorbed into secular society. The things that Jesus built among us would wither and die.

In John Chapter 17, Jesus took these concerns to the Father. He prayed what has come to be known as the High Priestly Prayer. It has three sections. First Jesus prayed about what would happen to him that night. He submitted to the will of the Father. He prayed that God would complete the work that had begun and glorify the Son.

Then he prayed for his followers. He knew that the mission was now on their shoulders. He prayed that God would sanctify them and protect them from the evil one. The thanked God for their faithfulness. He prayed that God might complete the work that had begun among them and glorify them as well.

Then he turned his attention on us – on people who would believe his message in the future. He prayed for unity among believers. He prayed that they would continue to be a witness to his ministry. He prayed that God would love them and glorify them as well.

Having prayed for himself and for present and future believers, Jesus left the upper room. He and the eleven crossed the Kidron Valley and went to the Mount of Olives, to the Garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus would pray fervently as he awaited his betrayal and arrest.

6.2 The Betrayal and Trial of Jesus

Matthew 26:47-27:26, Mark 14:43-15:15, Luke 22:47-23:25, John 18:2-19:15

Again, we have four accounts of the betrayal and trial of Jesus.

Table 5 - Betrayal and Trial of Jesus

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Judas arrived with an armed mob, sent by the chief priests and elders. He kissed Jesus as a signal to the mob that this is the one they were to arrest.	Judas arrived with an armed mob, sent by the chief priests and elders. He kissed Jesus as a signal to the mob that this is the one they were to arrest.	Judas arrived with a crowd. He kissed Jesus. Jesus said, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48)	Judas arrived with a soldiers plus some of the officials from the priests and elders. They were armed. Jesus asked them who they wanted. They replied "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." At this, they all fell to the ground. Jesus submitted to them and told them to let the disciples go.
The men arrested Jesus.	The men arrested Jesus.		
One of Jesus' companions pulled out a sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus told him to put away his sword. He reminded him that he could call down legions of angels to rescue him if it were appropriate, but that he needed to go through with this in order to fulfill God's will. The disciples fled and deserted Jesus.	One of Jesus' companions pulled out a sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus told him that he needed to go through with this in order to fulfill God's will. The disciples fled and deserted Jesus.	One of Jesus' companions pulled out a sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus told him to put away his sword. He healed the man's ear.	Peter pulled out a sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, Malchus. Jesus told him to put away his sword. He reminded him that he needed to go through with this in order to fulfill God's will. The disciples fled and deserted Jesus.
The mob took Jesus to the home of Caiaphas, the high priest, where the elders and teachers were waiting for him.	The mob took Jesus to the home of Caiaphas, the high priest, where the elders and teachers were waiting for him.	The crowd took Jesus to the home of Caiaphas, the high priest, where the elders and teachers were waiting for him.	The crowd took Jesus to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest.
Peter followed Jesus from a distance.	Peter followed Jesus from a distance.	Peter followed Jesus from a distance.	Peter and one other disciple (presumably John) followed Jesus

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
			from a distance.
		Peter was outside in the courtyard. Three times someone asked whether or not he was a follower of Jesus. Three times he denied that he was. Then the rooster crowed. Jesus looked straight at Peter. His prediction about Peter had come true. He wept bitterly.	Peter was outside in the courtyard. Three times someone asked whether or not he was a follower of Jesus. Three times he denied that he was. Then the rooster crowed.
		The men guarding Jesus beat him and mocked him.	Annas questioned Jesus, asking about his teachings. Jesus responded that he had always taught in public and said that if they wanted to know what he said they should ask his followers. They beat him. Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas.
The high priests and the Sanhedrin put Jesus on trial. They were looking for some crime for which they could put him to death. They could not get any witness to agree on any charges. Finally two witnesses agreed that Jesus had said "Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days" (saying this was hardly a crime). They asked Jesus whether or not this was true. He was silent and would not answer them.	The high priests and the Sanhedrin put Jesus on trial. They were looking for some crime for which they could put him to death. They could not get any witness to agree on any charges. Finally two witnesses said that Jesus had said "Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days." They could not even agree on the details of these charges. They asked Jesus whether or not this was true. He was silent and would not answer them.		
Finally they asked Jesus whether or not he was the Christ, the Son of God. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to	Finally they asked Jesus whether or not he was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus	The priests and elders asked Jesus whether or not he was the Christ. Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not	

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 26:64)	replied. "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:62)	believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God." (Luke 22:67-69)	
They declared that Jesus' response was blasphemy and condemned him to death.	They declared that Jesus' response was blasphemy and condemned him to death.		
They spit on Jesus, beat him, and mocked him.	They spit on Jesus, beat him, and mocked him.		
Peter was outside in the courtyard. Three times someone asked whether or not he was a follower of Jesus. Three times he denied that he was. Then the rooster crowed. Jesus' prediction about Peter had come true. He wept bitterly.	Peter was outside in the courtyard. Three times someone asked whether or not he was a follower of Jesus. Three times he denied that he was. Then the rooster crowed. Jesus' prediction about Peter had come true. He wept bitterly.		
Jesus was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor.	Jesus was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor.	Jesus was taken to Pilate, the Roman governor.	Caiaphas took Jesus to Pilate. In order to avoid ceremonial uncleanness at Passover time, they would not enter the palace and made Pilate come outside to meet them.
When Judas realized that Jesus had been condemned to death, he felt great remorse. He threw the money that he had been paid to betray Jesus into the temple. Then he went away and hanged himself. The priests used the money to buy a potter's field, turning it into a burial ground for foreigners. This fulfilled the words of Zechariah 11:12-13.			

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Note that Matthew quotes Jeremiah in Matthew 27:9-10, but these verses do not seem to be found in the surviving writings we have from Jeremiah.			
Pilate asked Jesus if he were the King of the Jews. Jesus replied "yes."	Pilate asked Jesus if he were the King of the Jews. Jesus replied "yes."		Pilate asked Jesus if he were King of the Jews. Jesus replied that he was a king, but that his Kingdom is not of this world. He came to bring a Kingdom of truth.
The priests and elders accused Jesus of many things. To Pilate's amazement, Jesus would not answer their charges.	The priests and elders accused Jesus of many things. To Pilate's amazement, Jesus would not answer their charges.	The priests and elders accused Jesus of telling people not to pay taxes to Rome. They said he claimed to be a king in opposition to Rome. They said that he was spreading teachings all over Judea that were in opposition to Rome.	
		Pilate asked Jesus if he were the King of the Jews. Jesus replied "yes."	
		Pilate really did not want to deal with Jesus. He learned that he was from Galilee. Galilee was under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, who happened to be in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Pilate tried to pass the problem off to Herod. He sent Jesus there for Herod's consideration. Herod had heard of Jesus and was curious to see what he could do. The priests and elders made many accusations against	

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
		Jesus in Herod's presence, but Jesus just stood silent. Herod mocked Jesus, dressed him in a royal robe, and sent him back to Pilate.	
Pilate's wife sent him a message to have nothing to do with Jesus because she had had a very troubling dream about him. Pilate realized that the people had no real charge against him and did not want to carry out their vendetta.			
It was a custom to release one prisoner at Passover. Pilate thought he could use this custom to get Jesus out of the hands of the priests and elders. He went to the crowds and asked them whether they wanted him to release Jesus or a murderer named Barabbas. The crowd had been incited to call for Barabbas. Pilate asked them what he should do with Jesus. They had been incited to shout, "Crucify him!"	It was a custom to release one prisoner at Passover. Pilate thought he could use this custom to get Jesus out of the hands of the priests and elders. He went to the crowds and asked them whether they wanted him to release Jesus or a murderer named Barabbas. The crowd had been incited to call for Barabbas. Pilate asked them what he should do with Jesus. They had been incited to shout, "Crucify him!"	It was a custom to release one prisoner at Passover. Pilate thought he could use this custom to get Jesus out of the hands of the priests and elders. He went to the crowds and asked them whether they wanted him to release Jesus or a murderer named Barabbas. The crowd had been incited to call for Barabbas. Pilate asked them what he should do with Jesus. They had been incited to shout, "Crucify him!"	It was a custom to release one prisoner at Passover. Pilate thought he could use this custom to get Jesus out of the hands of the priests and elders. He went to the crowds and asked them whether they wanted him to release Jesus or a murderer named Barabbas. The crowd had been incited to call for Barabbas. Pilate asked them what he should do with Jesus. They had been incited to shout, "Crucify him!"
Pilate gave into the wishes of the crowd. He washed his hands before them and said "I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility!" The people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" That was the idea all along.	Pilate gave into the wishes of the crowd.	Pilate gave into the wishes of the crowd.	
Pilate released	Pilate released	Pilate released	Pilate had Jesus

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Barabbas. He had Jesus flogged and turned him over for crucifixion.	Barabbas. He had Jesus flogged and turned him over for crucifixion.	Barabbas. He turned Jesus over for crucifixion.	flogged. The soldiers put a crown of thorns on him and a royal robe and mocked him.
			Pilate brought Jesus back before the crowd, hoping that the flogging would have placated them. He was still wearing the crown of thorns and the royal robe. He proclaimed "Behold the man!" The crowds again shouted "Crucify him!"
			Pilate repeated that he found no basis for crucifying Jesus. The Jews told him that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, and that he must be executed for such a claim. This frightened Pilate.
			Pilate went back and tried to get Jesus to defend himself. He did not want to execute him. Jesus would not defend himself. The Jews told Pilate that if he did not execute Jesus then he was no friend of Caesar, which frightened him as well. He did not need accusations like that floating back to Rome.
			Pilate brought Jesus before the crowd, ready to go ahead with the execution. He said "Here is your king." The people replied, "We have no king but Caesar." At that point in their existence, that was a true statement.

John records the dialogue that took place when the crowd entered the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus. Jesus asked them who they wanted. They said "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied "I am he." In Hebrew, "I am" is "Yahweh," the name that God had given to himself when he appeared to Moses at the burning bush. When Jesus spoke this, his accusers were knocked off their feet.

Jesus submitted peaceably to them. The disciples were confused. Peter tried to defend Jesus with a sword. He cut off a man's ear. Even in this situation, Jesus had mercy. He reached up and touched the man's ear and healed him. He explained to the disciples that he had to submit to this because it was the Father's will. He asked the soldiers to leave the disciples alone. The disciples fled, but Peter and John followed Jesus from a distance.

A mock trial was held. Nobody could agree on any crime that Jesus might have committed. Realize that this trial was happening in the middle of the night on Thursday night. The Jews had legal processes. They did not try people in the middle of the night. They did not accept the testimony of witnesses unless they could get other witnesses to correlate what was said. They did not beat prisoners who had not been convicted. Everything about this trial was a farce. They were simply looking to rid themselves of the "Jesus problem."

Finally they asked him whether or not he was the Son of God. He said that he was. That was all they needed. Jesus had committed blasphemy, claiming equality with God. At around daybreak they paraded him over to the home of Pilate, the Roman governor.

While all of this was going on, Peter watched at a distance. Three times people recognized him and asked him if he was a follower of Jesus. Just as Jesus had predicted, three times Peter denied knowing Jesus. The rooster crowed, as Jesus had said would happen after Peter denied him three times. Peter realized that he had failed Jesus and wept bitterly.

When the priests and elders arrived at Pilate's home, they still had no charge against Jesus that would be worthy of his death. The Romans would not care that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. They began accusing him of insurrection against Rome, telling people not to pay taxes and trying to set up a rival kingdom. Pilate realized that there was no merit to their charges. He did not want to get involved in what was obviously a religious dispute. According to Luke, he sent Jesus to Herod, hoping to pass the problem to him. He could do this since Jesus was from Galilee and Herod was the governor in Galilee. Herod would not take the problem off of Pilate's hands, however, and sent Jesus back to Pilate.

There was a custom whereby the Romans would release one prisoner at the time of Passover. Pilate hoped that he could turn to the people to get Jesus released, perceiving that his issue was with the priests and elders rather than with the masses. He went before the crowds and offered to release a prisoner to them, the choice being between Jesus and a murderer named Barabbas. The priests and elders worked the crowds and got them to shout for the release of Barabbas. Pilate asked what should be done with Jesus and the crowd was incited to call for his crucifixion. Pilate still did not see justification for doing this. He had Jesus flogged in an effort to appease his adversaries. They mocked him by putting a crown of thorns and a royal robe on him. Then he tried to release Jesus. The leaders told him that if he did not crucify Jesus, they would start rumors that he was supporting a rival king to Caesar. Pilate did not need trouble with Caesar so he agreed to hand Jesus over for crucifixion.

In an effort to distance himself from responsibility for this matter, Pilate publicly washed his hands in front of the crowd and said that he was innocent of the blood of this man. The crowd shouted "Let his blood be upon us and our children." How strangely prophetic that was. This is exactly why Jesus came, that his blood may be upon us and our children.

6.3 Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus

Matthew 27:27-28:20, Mark 15:16-16:20, Luke 23:26-24:53, John 19:16-21:25

Table 6 - Death, Burial, and Resurrection

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Soldiers took Jesus, stripped, him, put a royal robe on him, and placed a crown of thorns on his head. They put a staff in his hand and stood him up, dressed like a ruler. They made fun of him and spit on him. They took the staff from him and hit him in the head with it repeatedly. Then they took the robe off of him, put his own clothes back on him, and led him away to be crucified.	Soldiers took Jesus, stripped, him, put a royal robe on him, and placed a crown of thorns on his head. They put a staff in his hand and stood him up, dressed like a ruler. They made fun of him and spit on him. They took the staff from him and hit him in the head with it repeatedly. Then they took the robe off of him, put his own clothes back on him, and led him away to be crucified.		Jesus was led away to be crucified, carrying his own cross.
Along the way, the soldiers forced a man named Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross for him.	Along the way, the soldiers forced a man named Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross for him.	Along the way, the soldiers forced a man named Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross for him.	
		As they walked, many people were mourning for Jesus. He addressed some of the women and told them not to weep for him but for themselves.	
		Two criminals were taken along the path with Jesus to be executed.	
They came to a place named Golgotha, which means "the place of the skull."	They came to a place named Golgotha, which means "the place of the skull."	They came to a place called "The Skull."	They came to a place named Golgotha, which means "the place of the skull."
They offered Jesus wine mixed with gall. This was a drug that would have helped to deaden the pain.	They offered Jesus wine mixed with gall. This was a drug that would have helped to deaden the pain.		

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Jesus refused to drink it.	Jesus refused to drink it.		
They crucified him.		Jesus was crucified with one of the criminals on his right and the other on the left.	Jesus was crucified along with two criminals, one on his right and the other on the left.
		Jesus said "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."	
As he was dying, soldiers cast lots for his clothing.	Soldiers cast lots for his clothing.	As he was dying, soldiers cast lots for his clothing.	
	They crucified him around the third hour (9:00 am).		
Above his head nailed to the cross was a plaque saying "This is Jesus, King of the Jews."	Above his head nailed to the cross was a plaque saying "King of the Jews."		Above his head nailed to the cross Pilate put a plaque saying "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." It was written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek. Some of the Jews protested this, even now resisting any idea that Jesus was their king. Pilate would not remove the sign.
			As he was dying, soldiers cast lots for his clothing.
			Mary, the mother of Jesus, and John the disciple were present at the crucifixion. When Jesus saw them both there, he said, "Dear woman, here is your son," referring to John, and to John he said, "Here is your mother." From that time on, John took her into his home.
There were two robbers crucified with Jesus, one on each side.	There were two robbers crucified with Jesus, one on each side.		

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
As he hung there dying, people shouted insults at him. Some said "You said you could destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. If you are the Son of God, come down from there and save yourself." Others shouted, "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' "	As he hung there dying, people shouted insults at him. Some said "You said you could destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. If you are the Son of God, come down from there and save yourself." Others shouted, "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' "	As he hung there dying, people shouted insults at him. Some shouted, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One."	
		The soldiers also mocked Jesus. The offered him wine with vinegar to drink.	
		Above his head nailed to the cross was a plaque saying "King of the Jews."	
Even the robbers who were being crucified with him shouted insults at him.	Even the robbers who were being crucified with him shouted insults at him.	One of the criminals who was being executed shouted insults at Jesus as well. The other one said, "Don't you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus told him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."	

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
From the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 PM) darkness fell upon the land.	From the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 PM) darkness fell upon the land.	From the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 PM) darkness fell upon the land.	
		The veil of the temple was torn in two.	
At around 3:00, Jesus shouted "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"	At around 3:00, Jesus shouted "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"		
Some thought he was calling Elijah. Others thought he was asking for a drink and offered him wine vinegar on a sponge.	Some thought he was calling Elijah. Others thought he was asking for a drink and offered him wine vinegar on a sponge.		Jesus cried out, "I am thirsty." The soldiers lifted up a sponge soaked with wine vinegar.
Jesus cried out with a loud voice and gave up his spirit.	Jesus cried out with a loud voice and gave up his spirit.	Jesus cried, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Then he died.	Jesus cried, "It is finished." Then he died.
The veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.	The veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.		
An earthquake shook the land.			
Tombs of many holy people were opened. They came back to life. After the resurrection they went into the city and appeared to many people.			
One of the soldiers, a centurion, watched Jesus die and felt the earthquake and said "Surely this was the Son of God."	One of the soldiers, a centurion, watched Jesus die and said "Surely this was the Son of God."	One of the soldiers, a centurion, watched Jesus die and said "Surely this was a righteous man."	
			Passover was rapidly approaching and the Jews did not want people hanging on crosses during Passover. They asked Pilate to break

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
			the legs of those being crucified ¹ . When they came to Jesus, they discovered that he was already dead. This greatly surprised them. To ensure that he was really dead, they thrust a spear in his side. Out came a mixture of water and blood, which was a sign that his heart had ruptured. His legs were not broken.
Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. He prepared it and wrapped it and put it in his own tomb. A large stone was rolled over the entrance to seal the tomb.	Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to learn that he was already dead (death by crucifixion commonly took days). He gave the body to Joseph. Joseph prepared it and wrapped it and put it in his own tomb. A large stone was rolled over the entrance to seal the tomb.	Joseph of Arimathea was a leader of the Jews but he had not consented to what they had done. He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. He prepared it and wrapped it and put it in his own tomb.	Joseph of Arimathea was a leader of the Jews but he had not consented to what they had done. He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. He prepared it and wrapped it and put it in his own tomb. Nicodemus assisted Joseph in preparing the body.
The next day (Saturday), the priests and Pharisees went to Pilate. They remembered that Jesus claimed that he would rise on the third day. They told Pilate that they suspected that some of Jesus' disciples would			

¹Death by crucifixion was normally a lengthy and torturous process, taking days rather than hours. The manner in which the condemned was hung made it very difficult for him to breathe. To get a breath, it was necessary to push up on the nailed feet in order to take the pressure off of the chest. Thus the one being executed was forced to choose between not breathing or inducing fiery pain by pushing against the nails in his feet. Ultimately he would lose any strength he had left and he would suffocate anyway. The condemned died of suffocation rather than from the wounds of the crucifixion. If, for some reason, they wanted to hasten death, they would break the legs of the condemned. Breaking the legs meant that the prisoner could no longer push up to breathe and he would quickly suffocate.

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
attempt to steal the body and then claim that he had been resurrected. They asked that a Roman guard be placed at the tomb. Pilate had the stone sealed (anyone breaking a Roman seal could be put to death) and put a station of guards around the tomb.			
The next day (Sunday), Mary Magdalene and another Mary went to the tomb.	On Sunday, Mary Magdalene and Salome went to the tomb. They were concerned that a "rush job" had been done in preparing Jesus for burial. They brought spices to give his body a proper burial. They were wondering who might remove the stone for them so that they could enter the tomb.	On Sunday, some women went to the tomb. They were concerned that a "rush job" had been done in preparing Jesus for burial. They brought spices to give his body a proper burial.	On Sunday, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.
An earthquake shook the land. An angel came and rolled the stone away from the tomb. He shone like lightning. The guards were terrified. The angel told the women not to be afraid. He told them that Jesus had risen, just as he said he would. He invited them to inspect the tomb. He told them to go back and tell the disciples. He told them he would meet them in Galilee.	When they got there, the stone had been rolled away. They entered and a young man (perhaps an angel) was inside. He told the women not to be afraid. He told them that Jesus had risen, just as he said he would. He invited them to inspect the tomb. He told them to go back and tell the disciples. He told them he would meet them in Galilee.	When they got there, the stone had been rolled away. They entered and found that the body was gone. Suddenly two men (probably angels) appeared, gleaming like lightning. They told the women not to be afraid. They told them that Jesus had risen, just as he said he would. He invited them to inspect the tomb.	When she arrived at the tomb, she discovered that the stone had been rolled away. She ran and told Peter and another disciple, presumably John.
The women ran back to where the disciples were. Along the way Jesus appeared to them. They fell down to worship him. He	The women left, scared and bewildered. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and again told her to tell the	The women went and told the disciples what had happened. The disciples did not believe them.	

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
told them to run and tell the disciples that he had risen and would meet them in Galilee.	disciples what had happened. She told them and they did not believe her.		
		Peter ran to the tomb to see it for himself. There he found the empty linens with no body.	Peter and John ran to the tomb. They found it empty, except for the linens used to wrap the body. The headcloth was neatly folded lying in the tomb.
			The disciples went home. Mary remained there weeping and not understanding what had happened. Jesus appeared to her but she did not recognize him. She asked him what had happened to the body of her Lord. He called her by name and she realized that it was him. He told her to go tell the disciples that he was alive.
The guards left the tomb and went to see the chief priests and the elders. They told them what had happened. The priests and elders paid them money to say that they had fallen asleep on their watch and that while they were asleep the disciples had stolen the body.			
	Jesus appeared to two of the disciples as they were walking along a road. They told the other disciples but the others did not believe them.	Two followers of Jesus were walking along a road to Emmaus. Jesus appeared to them, but they did not recognize him. Jesus explained to them everything that had happened	

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
		<p>and how it fulfilled Scripture. Later they were eating. Jesus broke the bread and gave thanks. Suddenly they recognized him. They returned to the eleven to tell them what had happened.</p>	
	<p>Jesus appeared to the eleven as they were eating together. He rebuked them for their lack of faith and their failure to believe that he had risen.</p>	<p>As these two were telling the eleven about seeing Jesus, Jesus appeared in their midst. They were frightened. Jesus allowed them to touch his flesh and he ate with them so that they would know that he was not a ghost, but that he had been resurrected. He taught them and explained to them how the events of the last few days fulfilled Scripture.</p>	<p>Jesus appeared to the disciples. He spent some time teaching and assuring them. Thomas was not present. Later they told Thomas that they had seen Jesus and he did not believe them. He said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."</p>
			<p>About a week later, Jesus appeared to the disciples again. Thomas was present. Jesus offered to let Thomas touch the wounds in his hands and feet. Thomas simply replied, "My Lord and my God!"</p>
			<p>Tired, stressed, and discouraged, Peter decided to return to Galilee to resume his life of fishing. The other disciples went with him.</p>
			<p>One morning, Jesus appeared on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and called out to the disciples, who were out on the lake fishing. Jesus told them to throw their</p>

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
			nets on the right side of the boat and they would make a large catch. They did as he asked and caught so many fish that they could not pull them in. At that time, John realized it was Jesus. He told Peter. Peter jumped in the sea and swam to shore.
			Jesus fixed breakfast for the disciples and they ate together.
			Three times Jesus asked Peter to affirm his love for Jesus. Three times Peter assured Jesus that his love was genuine. Jesus gave Peter the mandate to "feed my sheep."
			Jesus informed Peter that his future was not necessarily going to be easy. He told him, "When you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." He was warning Peter that he too would suffer crucifixion. Still he encouraged Peter to be faithful and "follow me."
In Galilee, Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all	Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be		

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)	saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well. (Mark 16:15-18)		
		Jesus instructed the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they were "clothed with power from on high."	
	Jesus was taken to heaven.	Near Bethany, Jesus lifted up his hands to bless his disciples. As he did, he was taken up into heaven.	
	The disciples went out and began to preach as he had commanded. They saw the signs and wonders as they ministered, just as he had said.	His followers praised God. They remained in Jerusalem at the temple, rejoicing and praising God.	

Jesus was mocked. He was beaten. Before he ever began his journey down the road to Calvary, he was weak and half-dead from his beating, his flogging, and from lack of sleep.

A Roman flogging was serious business. The whip used had bits of bone or rock or metal embedded in the ends of the whip. The soldiers were trained to slap it into the back of the victim and then drag it across the back, taking out as much skin as possible in the process. Their goal was to inflict as much damage as possible without actually killing the victim. Jesus probably had little or no skin left on his back after this process.

The crown of thorns would have also inflicted physical pain. The obvious purpose was to humiliate this "man who would be king," but they have some serious thorns in Israel. These thorns were probably several inches long and they would not have been placed gently on the head of Jesus. They would have been pushed into his scalp.

Thus in this condition Jesus began his journey to the cross. Normally a prisoner would have to carry the crossbeam to which he would be nailed. As best we can tell, Jesus was too weak to make the entire journey carrying his own beam and thus Simon of Cyrene, a bystander, was pressed into service by the Roman soldiers. He carried Jesus' cross for him.

Reading about the crucifixion brings the words of Psalm 22 back in haunting proportions. The death of Jesus was portrayed by this Psalm a thousand years before:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, and am not silent.

In that poignant moment in history, Jesus took on himself the sin of the world. For the first time in his life, sin separated him from the Father and he felt the despair of that separation. On the cross, he cried out these very words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the praise of Israel.
In you our fathers put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.
They cried to you and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not disappointed.
But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by men and despised by the people.
All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads:
"He trusts in the Lord;
let the Lord rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him."

As Jesus hung on the cross, he endured the scorn of men. They mocked him and insulted him. They shouted these very words to Jesus, "He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you
even at my mother's breast.
From birth I was cast upon you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.
Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.
Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.
Roaring lions tearing their prey
open their mouths wide against me.

How Jesus must have felt like he was surrounded by bulls, tearing his flesh as if
it were prey.

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted away within me.

As Jesus hung on the cross, his bones would have likely pulled out of joint. We also know that his heart did literally melt. When they thrust the spear in his side, it poured out like water.

My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;

On the cross, Jesus did experience thirst. His tongue did stick to the roof of his mouth.

you lay me in the dust of death.
Dogs have surrounded me;
a band of evil men has encircled me,
they have pierced my hands and my feet.

Nailing someone to a cross involved piercing his hands and feet. Evil men encircled Jesus and did this very thing to him.

I can count all my bones;
people stare and gloat over me.

As Jesus hung on the cross, every bone in his chest and in other parts of his body would have been painfully visible.

They divide my garments among them
and cast lots for my clothing...

The soldiers did cast lots for his clothing while he hung there dying.

So in fulfillment of Scripture, according to the Father's plan, Jesus died. His life was not taken from him. He gave it up freely. He died incredibly early for a crucifixion victim. Nobody could believe that he died so quickly. As a result, his legs were not broken, in fulfillment of Exodus 12:46, which specified that none of the bones of the Passover lamb were to be broken.

When Jesus died, the veil of the temple miraculously tore into two pieces. This veil had separated the Holy of Holies – the dwelling place of God, from the rest of the world. It was no longer needed. The sin problem had been solved. God did not need to remain separate from the world. The death of Jesus allowed the Spirit of God to be poured out on all mankind. It paved the way for each of us to enter the throne room of God.

Two of Jesus' supporters among the Jewish leaders, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, claimed Jesus' body and prepared it quickly for burial. Passover began at sundown on Friday and thus they wanted to take care of this before then. They laid the body in a tomb belonging to Joseph. As was customary, a large stone was rolled across the entrance of the tomb to seal it.

Some of the Jewish leaders remembered that Jesus had predicted that he would rise on the third day. They did not want the disciples to steal his body and fake a resurrection. If that happened,

they would have a bigger problem on their hands than the one with which they started. Thus they convinced Pilate to officially seal the tomb and to put a guard around it.

On Sunday, none of this mattered. Regardless of anything that the Jews or the Romans could do, God had a resurrection on his agenda. The earth trembled. Angels appeared. The stone miraculously rolled away. Jesus was gone. The empty tomb was discovered first by Mary Magdalene and some other women who were followers of Jesus. They told the disciples. Peter and John came to witness the empty tomb for themselves.

Jesus began appearing to various of his followers. It was real. He was alive. Death and sin had been conquered. Only now could he fully explain everything to them. Only now did they fully realize who and what he was. He definitely had their attention. He used the days following his resurrection to rivet them into a band of men who would carry on what he had begun and change the course of the world.

He left them with final instructions – the Great Commission. They were go out and teach the world the things he had taught them. He had devoted his ministry – both before and after the resurrection – to the twelve. They were the main recipients of his teaching. They were a foundation that he had laid. It was time for them to go out and make a difference in the world. They needed to multiply the things that he had taught them. They would not have to do it alone.

He would be with them always, even to the end of the age. Furthermore, he instructed them to remain in Jerusalem and to wait to be clothed in power.

Pentecost was fifty days after Passover. It would not be long until that power came over them and they would indeed change the world.

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