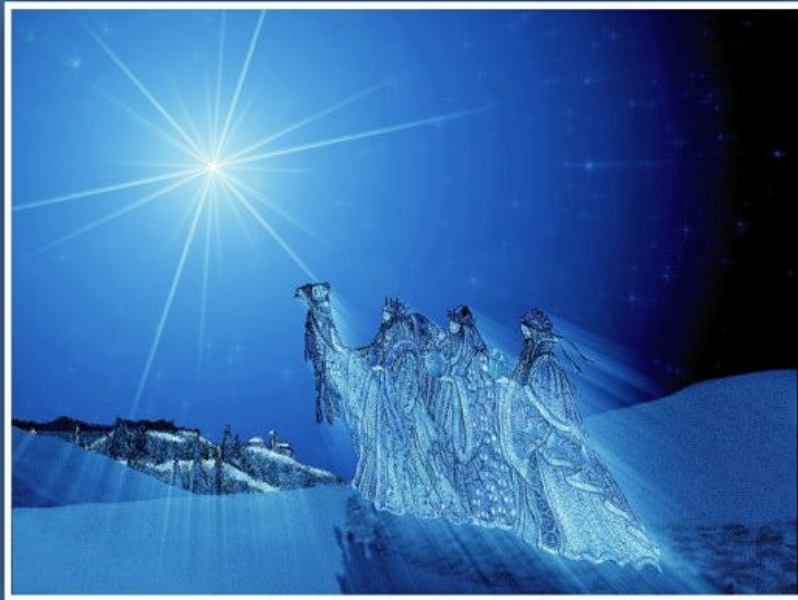


# THE HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

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## The Herald Of Christ's Kingdom



### The Gospel of Matthew

The King and His Kingdom • "That It Might Be Fulfilled"  
The Kingdom of Heaven • Secrets of the Kingdom  
Birth and Childhood • The Beatitudes • Death and Resurrection

# In the Beginning

## The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's gospel has always been prized by Christians. He proves by quoting the prophecies that the long-awaited Messiah has come. Without question he wrote for a Jewish audience. Some early church fathers believed he originally wrote in Hebrew with the Greek text we have now coming later. But since no fragment of an earlier Aramaic text exists, this has to be considered as simply a scholarly conjecture.

This issue of *The Herald* explores the life and ministry of Jesus as uniquely described by a former publican known by both the name Levi and Matthew. His attention to detail befits a former tax collector, who probably wrote before the others and took special care to be sure he had his facts straight. One scholar says more than forty percent of the material in this gospel cannot be found in Mark, Luke, or John.

We begin with a short overview entitled *The King and His Kingdom*. Although he was welcomed as a king by his own nation, Matthew points out that all mankind, not just Jews, will eventually be blessed because of Jesus. *That it Might be Fulfilled* explores many prophecies cited as proof that Jesus really was who he said he was.

*The Kingdom of Heaven* was the dominant subject of our Lord's ministry. He spoke of it nearly all the time and from various perspectives. The phrase is found only in Matthew. *Secrets of the Kingdom* considers the parables, especially those found only in this gospel. Parables simultaneously conceal truth from those with only casual interest while revealing much to those who truly want to know and do more.

*Jesus' Birth and Childhood* recounts some of the details associated with the birth of Jesus not mentioned by others. Especially interesting is the visit of the wise men, generally assumed to be three in number because three gifts are listed. *The Beatitudes and More* provides an overview of chapters five through seven often called The Sermon on the Mount. *Death and Resurrection* is the final article. There are at least six details about the crucifixion and resurrection that are found only in this gospel.

Matthew's perspective on the life and death of Jesus Christ is a precious treasure of the church today, as it has been all through the age. May we, as footstep followers of Jesus, draw strength from this account so that we, like the master, prove faithful even unto death.

## Messiah in the Prophecies

### **The King and His Kingdom**

*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.—Matthew 11:28-30*

The first four books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—are called the gospels [good news] because they describe the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the one who “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10). Like the four seasons in a year, each has its own distinct beauty and loveliness. We read them over and over and never tire of them, something that cannot be said of ordinary human history. Consider these stirring words from a nineteenth century biblical commentary:

“The Fourfold Gospel is the central portion of Divine Revelation. Into it, as a Reservoir, all the foregoing revelations pour their full tide, and out of it, as a Fountain, flow all subsequent revelations. In other parts of Scripture we hear Christ by the hearing of the ear; but here our eye seeth him. Elsewhere we see him through a glass darkly; but here, face to face. ... So long as the Gospels maintain their place in the enlightened convictions of the Church, as the Divine record of God manifest in the flesh, believers, reassured, will put to flight the armies of the aliens.”—Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *A Commentary*, vol. 3, pp. iii, iv.

The first three gospels are called synoptic because they look at the life of Jesus from the same point of view; their “synopsis” of his life is similar. But similar does not mean identical. There are differences because the writers had different objectives. Mark, for example, was attracted to the events in Jesus’ life. Matthew was more interested in Jesus’ teachings, so he gathered together all he knew about what our Lord taught on any given subject. He did not follow a rigorously chronological approach.

Although many of the followers of Jesus had limited formal education, that would not be true of Matthew. He was a tax collector, which required education. When he responded to Jesus’ call to follow him, he left everything behind except his pen (Matthew 9:9). He and John were two of the twelve whom Christ selected to be constantly with him, so they were in a position to use their own eyes and ears to report all that he did and said.

Nonetheless, as most will attest, it is not easy to remember much of what others say, especially if one does not understand what was said. So how could Matthew and the other evangelists remember such detail as spoken by the master? The answer is divine inspiration. Peter invoked divine inspiration when he referred to the writings of the ancient prophets: “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the holy spirit” (2 Peter 1:21, NIV). Jesus said, “The Comforter ... shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). Notice that the Comforter, a title for the

holy spirit, would teach them the meaning of the words it brought back into their minds. Because the writers were able to convey the sense behind the words—though they often did not understand the words when they were first spoken—their written records are invaluable to the Christian community.

Matthew shows Jesus Christ as king, the Messiah promised in the prophecies the nation revered. But this was a king unlike any the world had ever seen. What other king said, “I am meek and lowly in heart”? Which king promised “rest” to his subjects? Yet Matthew 11:28-30 provides one of the best explanations of the spirit of the gospel message to be found anywhere.

The words king and kingdom appear more often in Matthew than in any other gospel <sup>1</sup> Matthew begins his gospel by stating that Jesus Christ is the son of David—a phrase found more often in his gospel than in the others—and the son of Abraham. Why these and not “son of God” as we find it in Mark (1:1) and Luke (3:38)?

To be the son means to be the heir. Jesus Christ was the heir of David, the one selected to establish an everlasting kingdom: “When thy [David’s] days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee ... and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever” (2 Samuel 7:12,13). Jesus Christ was equally the promised seed of Abraham through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 28:14; Galatians 3:6).

Matthew stresses the kingly nature of the new-born babe in Bethlehem. Instead of shepherds we find wise men bearing costly gifts who seek the King of the Jews (Matthew 2:1). Jesus allows Pilate to call him the King of the Jews (Matthew 27:11). On the cross there is the sign proclaiming him to be the King of the Jews (Matthew 27:37).

Matthew’s view of Jesus as king permeates his writing. In Luke’s recounting of the parable of the marriage feast, the host is “a certain man” (Luke 14:16); in Matthew he is a king (Matthew 22:2). The first teaching of Jesus begins from a mountain (Matthew 5:1). Over and over Jesus demonstrates his right to be a law-giver with the words, “But I say unto you.” The kingly power of Jesus continues to the end of the book where again from a mountain Jesus uses words found no other place: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18), a phrase reserved for kings.

Because Matthew writes for a Jewish audience, he quotes extensively from what we call the Old Testament. He cites forty-three texts directly and eight indirectly. (An example of an indirect reference is in Matthew 11:14 where Jesus says, “If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come,” an indirect reference to Malachi 4:5.) Many of Matthew’s citations are not repeated in the other gospels. Thirteen of his quoted prophecies he specifically says were fulfilled by our Lord (see *“That It Might Be Fulfilled,”* p. 6).

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The Jews thought of themselves as having an exclusive relationship with God, one that excluded Samaritans, Gentiles, and certainly Roman soldiers. Yet Matthew describes the miracle of the healing of the servant of a Roman army officer who was responsible for one hundred men. That centurion's faith was so strong Jesus says of him, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matthew 8:10).

Matthew also foresees a day when all mankind will be blessed because of Jesus:

"I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."—Matthew 8:11

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in **all the world** for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."—Matthew 24:14

"Therefore go and make disciples of **all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."—Matthew 28:19, NIV

Matthew describes a close relationship between believers and the heavenly Father. In his gospel Jesus speaks of, or to, God as his father twenty-two times, much more often than in the other gospels. He sees believers amalgamated together in assemblies. The Greek word *ecclesia*, translated church, is used twice in Matthew and never by the other evangelists.

Matthew's gospel, the first book of the New Testament, brings a wonderful perspective to the life of our Lord. He is presented as a king presiding over a kingdom. The wonderful promise to his followers is that, if faithful, we will be with him: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Revelation 3:21).

## **"That It Might Be Fulfilled"**

*Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll.—Psalm 40:7, NIV*

*Timothy Alexander*

Before the first word of history was ever written, it was as though our Lord had already given his life. A beautiful and comprehensive plan carefully fashioned by God had been set in place and was waiting for the Firstborn of All Creation to come and live it.

The beautiful relationship Adam enjoyed with God had been violently uprooted; Adam and his family were thrust into a hostile world of sin and ever-increasing depravity. The only prospect of peace was the coming of the Seed of the Woman, the Son of Man, the Messiah.

The whole of Hebrew Scripture is filled with promises of what that Messiah, that Savior of the World, would be. Some of its most beautifully poetic language describes the hope the Son of Man would bring.

In Hebrew Scripture the Messiah is promised to be the son of Abraham, the son of David, and, indeed, the Son of God. The opening words in Matthew's gospel tell us that Jesus' earthly lineage fulfills each of those promises.

### **The Tax Collector**

The writer of this gospel has the name Matthew (see Matthew 9:9) and also Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). He was a tax collector, an occupation relegated to a lower stratum of Jewish society. The general population had no affinity whatever for those so employed. The paying of taxes reminded the Jews that they were under the heel of the Romans, and the collectors of taxes for Rome became the focal point of Jewish frustration and hatred. The Pharisees and Scribes at the higher levels of Jewish society also had no respect for those who collected taxes. They were called publicans (Matthew 10:3) and lumped together with "sinners" (Matthew 9:11).

As a tax collector Matthew came in contact with some of the meanest elements of society. Every day his job provided him tangible proof not only that the world really needed a Savior, but also proof that the empty righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was not the kind of loving care the true Messiah would have for God's chosen people.

Is it any wonder that while "sitting in receipt of custom" and hearing the blessed words "Follow me" from the lips of one who spoke like none ever had, he left his job without hesitation and allowed his life to be changed forever? The name Matthew means "gift of Jehovah." His new life following in Jesus' footsteps was certainly a gift from God; but of much greater importance in his mind was that it was this man Jesus who was the real gift God had promised to our first parents so long before.

It is no surprise that Matthew considered it a privilege to host a “great feast” at his home with Jesus as guest of honor. He undoubtedly invited other tax collectors and friends with whom he had worked, perhaps to say goodbye. This dinner was a witness to his friends and co-workers, and it was also a personal celebration of having found the Messiah. There was true joy at that dinner table, and Jesus must have been delighted to have found one of his sheep, one who had been given to him by God himself. Sadly, it was also at this dinner where the Pharisees asked, “How is it that he eateth with publicans and sinners?” (Matthew 9:11). There was no recognition that the “publicans and sinners” were actually being blessed by the Light of the World. The bitterness and insolence of the Pharisees’ question served only to reinforce Matthew’s heart that he had done the right thing to leave that empty Jewish system and commit his life to following the footsteps of the master.

### **Messiah: Despised and Rejected**

This great appreciation for the fact that Jesus was indeed the long-promised Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures is beautifully reflected in his gospel account. Reading through Matthew’s words, one realizes that one of his main objectives is to demonstrate that the Old Testament prophecies that speak so wonderfully of Messiah are all fulfilled in Jesus. On more than fifty occasions, Matthew either quotes, cites, or refers to the Old Testament.

It was well known that the Messiah would be of the house of David. Isaiah says that God himself would give the house of David a sign to identify the Messiah: a virgin would conceive and bear a son and would call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:13,14). It is this promise that Matthew says was fulfilled by the circumstances surrounding Jesus’ birth: “Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet.” And then Matthew adds that the name Immanuel means nothing less than “God with us” (Matthew 1:22,23).

In the soft, reflective light of history, many centuries removed from the actual event, these beautiful and poetic words have come to convey to us that the Messiah would be born as a completely sinless child and would truly be the son of God. When we hear of the circumstances attendant to Mary’s conception, our hearts are filled with confidence that the angel of the Lord actually did come to young Mary, that she actually did conceive of the holy spirit, and that Jesus was not the son of Joseph but the son of God.

Were the hearts of Mary’s family and friends filled with that same confidence? Mary was a fine and upstanding young lady. She had spent her entire life earning that reputation. Her family was well respected in the community. When the neighbors heard of these events, were they filled with greater respect for Mary and her family? Was this evidence to them that this new child was indeed the Messiah? It seems unlikely that this was the case.

It is considerably more likely that those who were endeavoring to live righteous godly lives, and trying to raise their families by those same principles, considered Mary’s

explanation of events to be less than genuine and certainly not reliable evidence of her child's purity. Even Joseph, the man to whom Mary was engaged, a man whom the Scriptures describe as just and kind and considerate, was not sure of her explanation. He was "minded to put her away privily" until an angel helped him understand what had happened (Matthew 1:19,20).

It is noteworthy that the angel addressed Joseph as, "Joseph, thou son of David." The original promise in Isaiah 7:13 was given to the House of David. With these words the angel reassured Joseph that he was also of that royal lineage, was of that house to which the promise of the coming savior was given. Joseph was the one chosen by God to be the man who would raise young Jesus to manhood.

If this was the struggle within Mary's family and friends, what would it be like with the general public? Most of the others, and particularly the Scribes and Pharisees, probably saw Mary as just another sinful young girl who got herself into trouble and came up with a creative way to divert attention away from herself. Most who heard her story undoubtedly saw Jesus' birth as common at best, and sinful at worst. This then became the first opportunity the self-righteous had to look down upon the Savior of the World, even before he was born.

Though born sinless, Jesus came to this earth to be mistreated and die as though a sinner, to be despised and rejected of men. Matthew (in 2:15) quotes Hosea saying that God would call his son out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1). Hosea's words have a primary application to the Passover when the children of Israel came out of Egypt. In Exodus 4:22,23 God tells Moses to tell Pharaoh, "My son, my firstborn, is Israel ... But if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I am going to slay thy son, thy firstborn" (*Rotherham*). That is why the tenth plague caused the death of the firstborn of Egypt.

But Matthew says Hosea's prophecy also applies to Jesus. Jesus truly was God's firstborn, his only begotten, and eventually the firstborn of many brethren. With the Passover event Egypt represented the world, the sinful human condition. Jesus never was a part of that condition, he never was a sinner, but he died as though he had been. In John 3:14 we are told that Jesus would be lifted up in the same way the copper serpent was lifted up in the wilderness to save the people (see Numbers 21). That copper serpent represented Jesus. Copper showed Jesus' perfect human nature; the serpent showed that, when Jesus was lifted up on the cross, he was dying as though he were actually sinful, having taken the penalty of Adam upon himself.

In another sense and in the minds of the Jewish community, Egypt was a contemptuous place. It was the place where the Jews endured the bitterness of slavery for centuries. For Jesus to have come "out of Egypt" may have added to the scorn most Jews had when they looked upon him.

Matthew quotes an Old Testament prophecy which says, "He [Jesus] came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene" (Matthew 2:23). Nazareth was a city in Galilee and was a poorly



regarded place. Judea was where Jerusalem, the holy city, was located, as well as Bethlehem, the City of David. Both Jerusalem and Bethlehem were places of great honor; Nazareth was not.

The Judeans looked down upon the Galileans. Galilee was considered a place of lower cultural character, less sophisticated language, and less pure religious practice compared to Judea. And while those in Judea looked down upon those from Galilee, those in Galilee looked down upon Nazareth. Nathanael was from Cana, another city in Galilee (John 21:2). Jesus described Nathanael as “an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.” Even though Nathanael was a man of generous heart, when he heard that the Messiah was from Nazareth, he wondered and said, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46,47). Nazareth became one more obstacle for faith in Jesus, one more opportunity to stumble on the Rock of Offense.

Thus Judea looked down upon Galilee, Galilee looked down upon Nazareth, and Nazareth looked down upon Jesus. There was a time when Jesus taught in the synagogue in Nazareth and spoke these most gracious words from Isaiah 61:1, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me ... [he] hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek ... to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” After these beautiful words, the people of Nazareth, because of their lack of faith, “rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong” (Luke 4:16-29).

### **Messiah Fulfills Prophecy**

According to Matthew the prophecy was, “He shall be called a Nazarene.” Which prophet said this? Neither “Nazareth” nor “Nazarene” appear anywhere in the Old Testament. McClintock and Strong’s *Cyclopedia* says the name Nazareth comes from a Hebrew word meaning “a sprout.” In this sense Matthew could have been referring to the prophecy in Zechariah which says, “Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The Branch; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD” (Zechariah 6:12). The word “Branch” is the Hebrew word #6780 in Strongs and means a branch, a growth or a sprout. Messiah is referred to as a branch in many places in the Old Testament. Isaiah speaks about the Branch that grows from the root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1). Jeremiah speaks about a Righteous Branch in the House of David (Jeremiah 23:5). Zechariah continues by saying that the Branch shall build the temple of the Lord, the New Creation, and shall be both a king and a priest upon his throne, and the result of those two royal roles will be that the “counsel of peace shall be between them both” (Zechariah 6:13).

Matthew tells us even Satan quoted the Old Testament and unwittingly demonstrated that Jesus was the Messiah. One of Satan’s temptations was to take Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple where he challenged him to prove he really was the son of God by casting himself down because God promised to protect him (see Matthew 4:5,6). Satan was quoting a psalm: “He shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways.

They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Psalm 91:11,12).

Psalm 91 contains the words of the older brother Jesus to his younger brothers, the New Creation. In verses 2 and 3 Jesus says that he has found from experience that he can trust God to protect him; you will find the same to be true in your lives. In verse 9, Jesus says to the New Creation, because you made God your dwelling place, because you gave your lives to God, he will give his angels the responsibility to protect you.

Jesus always did the will of his heavenly Father. Indeed he was “about his Father’s business” even at age twelve (Luke 2:49). And forty days before the wilderness temptations he announced the beginning of his formal ministry by being baptized at the hands of John. When Satan quoted Psalm 91, he was mocking the promise of God’s protection, to which Satan knew Jesus was entitled. But Satan stopped his quotation at verse 12 because verse 13 says Messiah and the resurrected New Creation will tread upon the lion and the adder, the young lion and the dragon, all references to Satan himself. Here is the same promise that was given to Mother Eve in the garden, that the serpent would bruise the heel of the promised seed, and the seed would bruise the head of the serpent. This is a clear reference to Jesus as the Messiah, something Satan acknowledged by omission.

Each of the Old Testament references in Matthew’s gospel carries a story, each is another compelling fragment of evidence that Jesus is Israel’s, and the world’s, Messiah, and each is fulfilled by a specific event in Jesus’ life.

After meeting the one he recognized as the Savior, Matthew experienced a miraculous transformation. His honest heart endured the trauma and sadness inflicted upon him and upon his Jewish brethren by the corrupt righteousness of the Pharisees. Thus when Jesus, the Light of the World, blessed Matthew’s life with the true spirit of grace and truth, his honest heart sprang to life and rejoiced that he had indeed found the Messiah.

What a blessing it is for us to have Matthew’s carefully prepared account of Jesus’ life, tenderly setting forth the prophetic evidence that Jesus, that despised young man from Nazareth, is indeed the Savior of the world.

## The Subject of Jesus' Ministry

# The Kingdom of Heaven

*Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

—Matthew 4:17

*Rolando Rodriguez*

There is no doubt about the continuing theme of the book of Matthew. It is captured in the words “kingdom of heaven,” a phrase that’s used thirty-two times (King James Version). No other book of the Bible uses this expression. The other gospel writers use “kingdom of God.”

Most Bible expositors believe the phrases “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” are synonymous. In parallel gospel accounts the terms are used interchangeably by the writers themselves (see Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15; Matthew 8:11 and Luke 13:28,29). Matthew himself uses the phrase “kingdom of God” five times (Matthew 6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31; 21:43).

John the Baptist began his preaching work admonishing those around him, “Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). Our Lord began his ministry with those same words (Matthew 4:17) and he taught his apostles to do the same when he sent them out to preach (Matthew 10:7). Not only was this kingdom the main topic of our Lord’s ministry, for most practical purposes it was his only topic!

In our Lord’s mountaintop sermon in front of the multitudes, “He opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven ... For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:2,3,20).

The subject of the “kingdom of heaven” permeates our Lord’s earthly ministry as well as the ministry of the twelve apostles, who were both instructed and commissioned by our Lord.

## What is the Kingdom of Heaven?

Some scholars believe “kingdom of heaven” is a reference to heaven itself, and that the message preached by the Lord and his apostles was heaven and how to get into it.

Others say the “kingdom of heaven” is a reference to a spiritual condition in the hearts of men which results in the transforming of lives and eventually even the society in which we live. They say the Lord and his apostles were preaching about the need for repentance and letting God reign in the hearts of men. If all did so, God’s will would be done in earth (Matthew 6:10).

These are but two of the commonly accepted ideas as to the meaning of the phrase “kingdom of heaven.” However, such thoughts are at odds with what the Scriptures declare. A careful search reveals that the “kingdom of heaven” is not a reference to heaven itself, or to some spiritual reigning of God in the hearts of men, but rather to the Messianic kingdom of peace foretold by the prophets and promised by God himself to the nation of Israel (Daniel 2:44,45; Isaiah 2:2-5; Micah 4:1-5).

In Genesis we read of a covenant relationship between Jehovah God and Abraham. Accordingly, the nation of Israel was to be a “great nation” in which “all families of the earth [shall] be blessed” (Genesis 12:1,3). The arrangement was to give land to Abraham where he and his descendants after him would forever dwell as this “great nation” and provide for the blessing of the world and administer God’s dominion over it (Exodus 19:5,6).

In prophesying about this event, Isaiah proclaimed: “It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people” (Isaiah 2:2-4).

This nation under God would provide the way for the world of mankind to walk in the paths of God. The will of heaven will reign and rule on the earth by way of the kingdom of Israel.

God raised up prominent ones to lead his people. History shows that despite God’s plans, Israel rebelled. In view of her rebellious ways and failures, God raised up king David and made a covenant with him and his descendants: “When thy days be fulfilled and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever” (2 Samuel 7:12,13; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14).

Isaiah rejoiced in this future day and proclaimed to Israel: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:6,7).

Daniel in a vision saw the end of Gentile dominion over Israel and the fulfillment of God’s promises to the nation: “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other

people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Daniel 2:44).

Israel’s covenanted kingdom was to be established through her Messiah, the promised seed of David, in accordance with the Davidic covenant. He would redeem his people and set up his kingdom dominion in Zion. This is what God’s covenant with Israel called for and this is what the expression “kingdom of heaven” refers to.

### **When is the Kingdom of Heaven?**

Jesus was born for a purpose. The angel announced to Mary that Jesus’ God-given mission was to fulfill the Davidic promise: “Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:31,33).

Jesus, the only-begotten son of God, left his heavenly home, was born of a woman, and became the promised seed of David, to sit on the throne of David and establish his kingdom on earth. The “kingdom of heaven” was “at hand”!

Not only was the promised Messiah on the scene, he was right on schedule as the prophets had long foretold (see Daniel 9:24-27). The establishing of the kingdom of heaven was nearing completion which prompted our Lord to tell the people as he preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).

This was the Divine Plan of the Ages. The long-awaited Messiah, the promised seed of David, the King of Israel, had arrived to announce that the covenanted kingdom of heaven was at hand. The work to be done was to prepare the way. Jesus taught the people the beatitudes in view of this kingdom (Matthew 5:1-12). He taught how to gain an entrance into it (Matthew 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23; 24). He expounded on who would be the “least” and the “greatest” in it (Matthew 5:19; 11:11; 13:32). He even told his closest disciples of their special positions in it (Matthew 19:28). And finally, he warned about the destructive judgments he would execute upon the nations prior to fully establishing the kingdom (Matthew chapters 24 and 25).

The apostles eagerly looked for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). They proclaimed to Israel the arrival of her “last days” (Acts 2:1,36) as spoken of in the prophets, and exhorted the people to respond positively to the offer of the kingdom (Acts 3:12, 26).

It is evident that the “kingdom of heaven” has not yet been established on the earth. None of the prophetic pronouncements concerning its establishment have been completely fulfilled. Yet when our Lord was on earth, the “time” was “fulfilled” and so it was preached as being “at hand.” What happened? Why hasn’t “the God of heaven” fully set up that promised kingdom?

Though many have tried to explain, God's own explanation concerning what he has done and what he will yet do is what needs to be understood and appreciated.

The apostle Paul tells us why there is a delay in establishing Israel's kingdom. God has temporarily set aside his plans for Israel and has ushered in a new age. In Romans Paul writes that when Israel "stumbled" at the testimony of Christ, God "blinded" the nation and turned to the Gentiles: "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (Romans 11:25; compare John 12:37-40; 2 Corinthians 3:14).

God "blinded" Israel and put his plans and his special dealings with that nation on hold. God turned his attention to the Gentiles and has provided an age of grace. Paul writes: "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; ... which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Ephesians 3:1-6).

This time of grace is what God is now supervising. God has "not cast away his people," has not discarded them. Her "fullness" is yet to come. Since her "blindness" is "in part until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in," Paul goes on to say: "So all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Romans 11:1,26,27).

Israel's "fullness" is yet to come, and when it does, "the LORD shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one" (Zechariah 14:9).

As Isaiah declares to the redeemed and the delivered of Israel in that day, "Ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ... For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations" (Isaiah 61:6,11).

### **One Kingdom, Two Phases**

The literal kingdom will not find Jesus sitting on a literal throne on earth. The kingdom of heaven is a spiritual kingdom, unseen by the human eye, but its influence will be worldwide. When asked about his kingdom, Jesus replied: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you [NASV: in your midst]" (Luke 17:20,21).

Israel will be the earthly representative of that heavenly kingdom and its ancient patriarchs of old will be its rulers. Jesus and his church will constitute the heavenly phase of that kingdom.

Israel's promised kingdom is yet to be established. God's word is sure, for he cannot change or alter his promises (Psalm 89:34). However, God's plan for Israel is still in abeyance. God is working out "the mystery of Christ" in this "dispensation of grace" and is preparing a "new creation," the church, the body of Christ, made up of both Jew and Gentile, for his purposes. When that work is complete, "all Israel shall be saved" and their promised kingdom will be fully set up. Through them "all the nations of the earth will be blessed."

## The Kingdom Parables

### Secrets of the Kingdom

*He spake many things unto them in parables.—Matthew 13:3*

*Donald Holliday*

Today it might seem incredible that so few were able to recognize the regal presence of earth's great king when he walked among them two thousand years ago. Yet it is no less remarkable that the "presence of a king" is again intelligible only to certain "watchers" today. The disciples were surprised and curious that their master raised not his voice openly in the street with such plain declarations that would have gathered an eager rabble of support around him. Instead, he seemingly preferred to speak in language veiled, with encoded message few could understand unless desperate for the truths contained therein. There was no response to the Pharisees' demand for signs of their own conceiving. Their eyes were closed to a Messiah dressed in garb of humble Nazarene. They looked for another.

If Matthew's gospel shows Jesus in the role of king<sup>1</sup>, as many suggest, it also reveals the powerful influence of the prince of this world in creating in the human heart a state impervious to the sacred depths of the most blessed truths uttered by perfect human lips. This interplay of light and darkness would form a frequent subject of the master's parables.

Jesus would often illustrate his teachings in everyday color: 'savourless salt' and 'a lamp hidden under a pot.' He knew these would linger in the mind. But there was something else in the master's parables. Some of them could be called, "Tales of the unexpected." Particularly was this true of the master's teachings concerning the kingdom. The gospels together are said to record some forty-two stories told by Jesus to illustrate truths. There are an additional thirty-three brief sayings and metaphors. Doubtless there were more. Jesus identified certain of his stories with the kingdom. What was so unexpected about these?

The much-relished Jewish expectations of the kingdom of God were indeed drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>2</sup> It would be an earthly kingdom, involving the return of the dispersed of the nation, and it would be manifest with the appearing of the Messiah. Israel's supreme position was assured, together with the subservience of the Gentile nations who would come bowing submissively to this chosen nation. So much in this concept fueled Jewish pride and prestige. Messiah was expected to deal swiftly and decisively with the Roman captors.

Only a few who mourned in spirit recognized that their real oppressors were sin, and the array of pride, selfishness, and the human ego that fails to comprehend the true worship of God. Jesus came preaching the kingdom of heaven. Matthew vividly reports his Sermon on the Mount (see *The Beatitudes and More*, p. 26) in which Jesus presented concepts of the kingdom that would be startling to many. Herein lay the true nature of the kingdom that God's people must now acknowledge or they would continue to follow the mistaken pathway marked out by the scribes and Pharisees. His teachings were accompanied by many miraculous healings that demonstrated his authority over nature,



sickness, demons, and even over death itself. Many reliable signs demonstrated that he was sent of God. Yet the people hesitated! Though his listeners seemed moved, their enthusiasm was short-lived. They saw the evidence, yet few would pledge their allegiance to earth's new king.

It is in this context that Jesus began to speak in parables. The people's failure to respond revealed that same deep-seated inertness to truth that God had foretold through Isaiah the prophet (Matthew 13:13-15). So Jesus would now speak in parables, in a language designed for the hungry and thirsty whose hearts would burn within them (Luke 24:32).

### **Kingdom Parables**

The kingdom parables fall into two categories. Seven contrast features of the unexpected kingdom Jesus inaugurated with features of the earthly kingdom expected by the Jews. All seven are found in Matthew 13. (Two of the seven are also in Mark; three of the seven are also in Luke.)

	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Luke</b>
The sower	13:3-9,18-23	4:3	8:5
Wheat and tares	13:24-30,37-43		
Mustard seed	13:31,32	4:31	13:19
Leaven	13:33		13:21
Hidden treasure	13:44		
Priceless pearl	13:45,46		
Dragnet	13:47-50		

What were the elements so unexpected about the kingdom message? Why are they called the "secrets" of the kingdom, and indeed of the king himself? The answer is threefold:

1. The unexpected manner of Messiah's coming.
2. The unexpected nature of the kingdom.
3. The unexpected process leading up to its full inauguration.

Thus would these mysteries be sealed up from the unworthy until, at the time of the end, Israel's blindness would be removed.

The first seven parables of Matthew 13 describe various developments throughout the long age that was to **precede** the second advent of earth's king and the coming of his kingdom. Then the "harvest," described as the ending of the age, would take place under the auspices of the returned Lord. However, two of these parables, the 'Mustard seed' and the 'Leaven,' have sometimes been taken out of context and misapplied to a gradual process of kingdom development during this intervening age. There is some resulting confusion, therefore, as to the nature of the promised kingdom and the time of its commencement. One careful Bible scholar has regarded this error to be so serious and widespread even among Protestants that he has devoted three weighty volumes, drawing over a thousand references from Christian resources, in refuting this mistaken idea.<sup>3</sup>

These parables not only portray events during the age but they also answer a number of pertinent questions.

1. Why does presenting the truth message produce such various results? The parable of the Sower gives the Lord's answer to this.

2. Why has the corrupting influence of error been allowed to test the patience of truth-loving saints? The parable of the Wheat and Tares not only describes this trend towards apostasy, but it rewards the longing hearts of his people with the prospect of the joys of the harvest home.

3. Why was the remarkable enlargement of Christendom not indicative of true spiritual growth? The parable of the Mustard Seed shows it was the work of "a man" (the "man of sin"), not God (2 Thessalonians 2:3,4; Revelation 18).

4. Can any apparently trivial input of erroneous doctrine and spirit permeate an entire group.<sup>4</sup> Jesus warned of this in the parable of Leaven, and history has confirmed it even to this time of harvest. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Purge out, therefore, the old leaven" (1 Corinthians 5:6,7). The lesson continues today: "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Corinthians 3:17).

Here there is a break as Jesus sends the people away. The remaining parables are for his disciples' ears only, for these are sacred truths (Matthew 13:16,17).

5. Is there such a prize that a man would sell all he had to obtain it? This is the Lord's assessment and it is awesome to those he regards as his treasure hidden in a field. He gave all that he had to buy that field and its precious contents. Not one of us can estimate the enormity of the value that he set upon us when giving that price with which we have been bought: "So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty" (Psalm 45:11).

6. Is there a pearl which compares with nothing else on earth for its value, and are some truly willing to give all, not weighing its cost, to obtain it?

"We have such things as should make us happy under the most adverse circumstances, so far as the present life is concerned. We, by the grace of God, have found the pearl of great price, and are not only content with the terms upon which it is offered to us, but most gladly willingly, joyfully, we count all else but loss and dross that we may retain our ownership in it, win Christ and be found in him, members of the body of the great Prophet, Priest and King, who shortly, as the antitype of Moses, shall stand forth as the deliverer of all who love righteousness, from the bondage of sin and Satan."—*Reprints*, p. 2352.

7. Is there an explanation for the turmoil of Christianity today? Why the separations? Why so many testing experiences? Why so much sorting out of where we are, what spirit we are of, and to whom we belong? The seventh parable, the 'Draught of Netts,' explains.

In fact there are eight parables in Matthew 13. The final one is in Matthew 13:52, "Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."

"The word of the Lord is indeed well compared to a rich treasure house, or a precious box of jewels. Out of this treasure it is the Christian's privilege to bring forth one precious thing after another, for admiration and encouragement; and it is the teacher's duty and privilege, as represented by the Scribe, to bring forth these precious things for the edification of the flock of God, over which he is Overseer. When we receive Christ as our own—not a set of ideas merely about Christ, but himself as a living, personal, and loving Savior—we receive the whole truth. 'I am the Truth.' The whole box of jewels is ours, though at first we may know

but little of what it contains. It is the life work of the Christian to ‘grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’ (2 Peter 3:18).”—*Reprints*, p. 118.

Five additional kingdom parables are found only in Matthew’s gospel. Rather than contrast the expected and unexpected form of the kingdom, these five illuminate principles on which the unexpected kingdom operates. They are:

**The Unforgiving Servant**  
**The Generous Landowner**  
**The Marriage Feast**  
**The Ten Virgins**  
**The Talents**

**The parable of the unforgiving servant** (Matthew 18:23-35). Jesus uses contrast to show the attitude of each saint who, aware of total dependence upon divine grace, exhibits that same merciful and generous spirit to his brethren. Such, in due course, will earth’s society be.

**The parable of the generous landowner** (Matthew 20:1-16). This was the master’s reply to Peter’s question, “What shall we have therefore?” (Matthew 19:27). Whether we are called to do much or little in the master’s service it is all of grace; no true saint will have any inflated thought of a personal, earned reward. Those of mankind who come to serve the Lord with one consent in the age opening before us will recognize how great a privilege it is to know and wait upon the Lord under the motivating power of appreciative love.

Application has been ably and helpfully made of this parable to the encouragement of the saints at this eleventh hour:

“In the little time which remains before the glorification of the remainder of the Body —the church, let us endeavor to make our calling and election sure, and thus prove that we have not received the grace of God in vain. If you have made the covenant of sacrifice, even at the eleventh hour, your sacrifice should be on the altar and the fire of zeal under it consuming your time, talents, reputation and all in the heavenly service. Let it be burning briskly, that the odor of sweet incense may ascend to God, that you may be fully accepted in the Beloved in this acceptable time, and be made partaker of the glory to follow—now at hand.”—*Reprints*, p. 859.

**The parable of the marriage feast** (Matthew 22:2-14). We are again reminded of grace. Not all the many who are called become chosen and faithful. Few there be that find the lowly door, or can pass through the needle’s eye. Yet, entering in, what a feast anticipates the marriage of the king’s son! In such a presence no flesh will glory. Thankful are we indeed to the end of the way for the robe we wear.

“Jesus, Thy spotless righteousness,  
My garment is, my glorious dress.”

Remove that robe and what ugliness appears! Nor should we dare lift the robe from other saints.

**The parable of the ten virgins** (Matthew 25:1-13). “And now he has come!” Long past the moment of the bridegroom’s return, yet the message of this lesson holds its meaning for saints still awaiting that blessed moment of entering in. Hope delayed has been the

test of the age. How long will earth's destroying winds hold back? How long before the final saint is sealed? For all that he must yet achieve in us, "Brethren, the time is short."

"Behold, behold the Bridegroom!  
And all may enter in,  
Whose lamps are trimmed and burning,  
Whose robes are white and clean."

**The parable of the talents** (Matthew 25:14-30). With all we have received of him as sacred trust—the opening of the ear to his most holy will, with every spiritual sense to gratify, and boundless grace explore for every trial and task—for one thing only do we long to hear: "Well done" from the lips of the master. The time is short to make our calling sure. The hours race by. The last stretch of the course demands our all, no privilege despised, no moment lost to demonstrate our love, that ours may join that sweetly savored trail of broken alabaster boxes treasured by our Lord (Psalm 27:4).

These are the secrets of our king and his kingdom, their preciousness now known only to his saints. How welcome will be the day when all ears are opened to the joyful sound and these become secrets of happiness shared by all his family—those on earth as well as those in heaven. "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant" (Psalm 25:14).

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1. In the King James Bible the words king and kingdom appear 70 times in Matthew, 30 times in Mark, 50 times in Luke, and 16 times in John.

2. "To them the coming of the Messiah undoubtedly implied the restoration of Israel's kingdom, and, as a first part in it, the return of 'the dispersed.'"—Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, chap. 6.

3. George N. H. Peters (1825-1909), *The Theocratic Kingdom* (three volumes, 2,000 pages).

4. Leaven=sour dough. Always used in a bad sense, as meal is in a good sense. The Lord mentions three kinds of leaven, all of which were evil in their working. ... "A woman in the moral or religious spheres" is a common symbol of evil. See Zechariah 5:7,8; Revelation 2:20; 17:1-4.—Bullinger, *Companion Bible*, comment on Matthew 13:33.

## We Have Seen His Star

# Jesus' Birth and Childhood

*Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.—Matthew 2:2*

*Richard Doctor*

The story of our Savior's nativity can be told from many standpoints. Matthew's account speaks of our Lord's infancy with four events uniquely described in chapter 2: the visit of the wise men; the Bethlehem massacre; the flight to Egypt; and the return to Nazareth. The heavenly Father's gift to mankind of his own son is surely one of the greatest gifts ever, yet the making flesh of the "Word" (John 1:14) is also a miracle that simply is beyond human understanding. This gift, and the gift-giving by the magi, make the custom of exchanging gifts one of the most cherished traditions of the nativity season. This aspect of the nativity unquestionably captures the most attention, even for those holding weak or no faith in the mission of Jesus.

## The Visit of Wise Men

The basis for today's gift-giving is introduced with these words: "When they [the magi] were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11). Who were these wise men bringing gifts?

If we turn to Isaiah's prophecy of Messiah's advent we read: "For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isaiah 60:2,3). Clearly some of the promises here that foretell "the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee" (Isaiah 60:5) will have their fulfillment in a future time when the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9). But there does seem to be a first-advent fore-gleam that speaks to a more glorious fulfillment in the second advent. We find this both in the phrase, "kings to the brightness of thy rising" and "The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD" (Isaiah 60:6).

Both the gold and incense are specifically mentioned in Matthew and Isaiah. But Isaiah's prophecy has a promise of the reconciliation within the extended family of Abraham. Midian and Ephah are Abraham's descendants through Keturah (Genesis 25:2-4). Likely, some among these descendants remained faithful to the worship of the one true God, even up to the time of the Messiah, to participate in the magi's search for the seed of promise. Remaining faithful would not have been easy. The Midianites as a whole

became quite idolatrous and the unusual extent of their idolatry is mentioned by Nebuchadnezzar's chronicles nearly six centuries before Messiah's birth. Early in Israel's history Moses took refuge among the Midianites and married the daughter of one of their priests (Exodus 2:15,21). Jethro, a Midianite priest, was apparently one who maintained the patriarchal system of worshipping the one Creator as handed down through Shem. Jethro sagely advised Moses on the governing of Israel and was the inspiration for the Sanhedrin (Exodus 18:13-27). Sadly, the friendly relations between Israel and Midian did not survive the experiences in the wilderness.

The promise in Isaiah next speaks of Sheba. Sheba was descended through the line of Ham's son Cush (Genesis 10:6,7) and was part of Ham's race that settled in the rich spice region along the Persian Gulf. Sheba established a major city called Raamah (Ezekiel 27:22). In the Isaiah prophecy we find both the descendants of Shem's and Ham's extended families are promised to bring gifts of gold and incense, just as the Matthew account attests.

At the time of Christ's birth, there was a formal office called "magi." These were the class of men with special knowledge among the Babylonians who were early astronomers supported in the royal service. They used their astronomical knowledge in the state-service of the pseudo-science of astrology. As we learn from the account of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, they were expected to interpret royal dreams. During the captivity of Israel in Babylon, Daniel was made the third ruler in the kingdom (Daniel 5:16); possibly this promotion made him the "Chief of the Magi." This was an office that appears in Jeremiah 39:3,13 where it is left untranslated as the title "Rabmag."

Tradition holds that all three of mankind's races were represented at the nativity and there are plausible Scriptural reasons for accepting this view, for it is among the Magi of the Persians, who are descendants of Japheth, rather than the magi of Babylon, that we find adherents to a monotheistic faith that persists unto this day. Persecution under Islam forced their migration to India where they are known as "Parsi" or "Persians." Their beliefs survive in the collection of codification of this patriarchal wisdom that was collected in later times in the "Songs of Zarathustra." Pastor Russell cautiously quoted accounts that these texts were a result of Jeremiah's instruction.<sup>1</sup> These non-biblical writings speak both of a singular "Savior," and of "Saviors" who would return God's law to mankind in a hoped-for future epoch. In these writings we see the echo of the Patriarchal belief system. We see a remembrance of the promise to mother Eve as the "groaning creation" patiently waits for the "refreshing" of the "times of restitution" (Acts 3:19-21). These writings reference a company of saints known as "The Refreshers of the Days" and hold out hope for a future time of blessing when "Good Mind" would inspire mankind. They believed in a resurrection.

We should not be surprised at this preservation of mankind's true hopes from the times of the patriarchs. Jude says this knowledge was already revealed even before the great flood that brought an end to the first world: "Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints" (Jude 14). Because they were adherents to this ancient patriarchal wisdom, the magi patiently

waited, searching the night sky until they saw the “star in the east.” This celestial event alerted them to the birth of him who was to be the King of the Jews.

This may have been the non-biblical text from their sacred writings in their minds: “When, O Lord of Wisdom, those who are the Refreshers of the Days shall come forth to uphold the spiritual life of Divine Law and Order, Righteousness, Truth, and Holiness through the powerful teachings of the Future Saviors of Mankind and their divine plan for salvation, then shall the Good Mind come to them for inspiration. As for me, O Lord of Life, I choose Thee alone as Master. ... What man hast Thou appointed protector over me, O Lord of Life? ... Who is he, in very truth the foremost devotee, who shall teach me how we may glorify Thee as most worthy to be loved, as radiant in action, as Lord of Life and Truth?”<sup>2</sup>

Sadly, after Christ’s birth the successors of the Persian Magi as a group lost their moorings in God’s promises and they found both a willing and moneyed audience willing to pay for fortune-telling, occultism, and astrology. The Greek word for their activities, *magikos* from which we derive the word magic, speaks to the popular face of their worship. There has always been something of a fascination with this monotheism from the patriarchal times. This interest should be tempered with caution. The Magian fascination with divination, angels, and the judgment of the soul at death sending it to either eternal bliss or eternal punishment, have propagated confused and God-dishonoring doctrines.

But let us celebrate those faithful ones who had waited so long and so patiently for the promises of God to come true. It was they, not the specially blessed Jewish nation, who kept searching the sky each night for the fulfillment of the gospel story. This is the accurate reading of the Zodiac, or Mazzoreth (Job 38:32). Any time there is spiritual insight and knowledge of the plan of God, we should not be surprised to find Satan hard at work, attempting to turn it to his own use; nor should we be ignorant of his devices.

There is yet one more aspect of the magi that may clarify their title. The translators identify these earnest seekers as “wise men.” Linguists would suggest that more correctly they are “great men” seeing the Persian *magi* as a cognate with the Sanskrit *mohat* and the Greek *mega*, both meaning “great.” There is a significant lesson here. It is character rather than office that earns this revered title. During the twentieth century the world came to respect India’s gentle moral champion “Mohatma” Ghandi from the Sanskrit word *mohat*. This was a title of honor accorded to him by popular acclaim without any formal office, and this perhaps gives the most accurate sense of what the title “magi” should convey.

### **The Bethlehem Massacre**

A cruel and heartless act, consistent with Herod’s reprobate character, marked the next stage in Matthew’s account of our Lord’s infancy (Matthew 2:16-18). Herod had diligently inquired of the magi about the appearance of the star, for he and his entire court felt threatened by this development: “He was troubled and all Jerusalem with him”

(Matthew 2:3). So began the record of the unhappy rivalry between the old order in Jerusalem and the future Messiah. Joseph and Mary had moved from the site of the manger and settled into a house in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:9). Herod, perceiving that the magi were not returning to disclose the location of the infant, became exceedingly angry. He ordered the slaying of all the male children “in Bethlehem, and in all the districts thereof,” from two years old and under. Jesus, born near October of 2 B.C., possibly was near the age of two months when Herod died near the opening of the year 1 B.C.<sup>3</sup> so these events may have occurred when he was a few weeks old; this gruesome order may have been carried out surreptitiously. Thus, Matthew records, was fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted ... because they were not” (Jeremiah 31:15).

While historians have given us a long list of Herod’s atrocities, Matthew’s account has received considerable criticism since no other historical corroboration of this heinous crime exists. Both Ferrar and Edershiem calculate that approximately twenty infant males might have suffered in the “slaughter of the innocents.”<sup>4</sup> In all likelihood, the relatively small population of Bethlehem and its separation from the immediate neighborhood of Jerusalem combined with a “cover-up” provide sufficient explanation for the lack of historical corroboration. Certainly none challenge that the account is consistent with Herod’s character. What Matthew has most admirably done is to focus our attention on the importance of recognizing that even when Scripture may be narrowly interpreted, there is often a more universal and comprehensive lesson in it.

This is the way the end of the Jeremiah 31 text reads: “Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy **work** shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.” (verses 16 and 17).

A returning to one’s own “border” holds within it the promise of resurrection. Yet, the geographical proximity of Ramah to Bethlehem does not completely explain why Matthew invoked a prophecy about Ramah which lies due north of Jerusalem to describe events that took place at Bethlehem, which lies to the south. Apparently the relationship between these two towns goes beyond their proximity to Jerusalem within eleven miles of each other. There are a number of plausible reasons why Rachel would have been said to be weeping at Ramah. Rachel is, of course, allegorical since she had been dead for nearly nineteen centuries when Herod’s assassins came to Bethlehem. There are richly-linked lessons in the experiences of Ephraim and Manasseh across the Jordan, the near extinction of Benjamin as a tribe, and the unhappy initiation of the monarchy under the Benjamite, Saul.

Within the context of the captivity to Babylon at the time of Jeremiah’s prophecy the Assyrians had exiled the northern kingdom centered on Joseph’s descendants Ephraim and Manasseh. These would be the two offspring of Rachel’s firstborn. It is Ramah’s location in the territory of Benjamin, only a few miles from the border of Ephraim, which



would have been a natural place for Rachel to mourn the losses of her children as the tribe of Benjamin now went into captivity to Babylon. Ramah was a staging point for this exile (Jeremiah 40:1). Though the traditional site of Rachel's tomb is located about a mile north of Bethlehem (about ten miles south of Ramah), Genesis says only that Rachel was buried somewhere between Bethel and Bethlehem (Genesis 35:16-20). After Samuel anointed Saul at Ramah, he told Saul that he would meet two men near Rachel's tomb on his way home to Gibeah (1 Samuel 10:2). This is an apparent indication that Rachel's tomb was in the immediate vicinity. If Ramah was near the place where Rachel died on her way to Bethlehem, this might explain why Matthew invoked Jeremiah's prophecy in connection with the slaughter of the innocents at Bethlehem (Matthew 2:18). From this we see that the relationship between Bethlehem and Ramah was not one of mere geographical proximity, but one of shared historical memory. Once again, a foreigner had persecuted and slain the Lord's inheritance. Herod the Great was an Edomite, installed by Roman authority, and not an inheritor of God's promises with Israel. The blood on the swords of the soldiers carrying out the ghastly order satiated Herod and no further search was made for the family; they made good their escape to Egypt by means of this costly sacrifice. Rachel's "work" throughout Israel's history, if examined, may well turn out to be the offering of costly sacrifice that the work of the Lord's program might be protected.

### **The Flight to Egypt**

“And when they [the magi] were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt.”—Matthew 2:13,14

Six centuries earlier as the victory of Babylon against the corrupt remnants of Jewish sovereignty occupying David's throne became a certainty, a sizable contingent of Jews preferred to immigrate to Egypt rather than submit to exile in Babylon. Jeremiah counseled against such a course; chapter 44 contains the Lord's special warning to this Jewish community that already had established itself in the Egyptian cities of Migdol, Tahpanhes, Noph, and in the country of Pathros. Later, after the conquest of Alexander the Great, the port city of Alexandria was founded in Egypt in the third century B.C. Alexandria became a thriving center of trade that was quite prosperous in Roman times and was notable for its large and affluent Jewish community. This was the community responsible for the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament Hebrew, a translation commonly used during the times of the apostles.

Local Egyptian Christian tradition holds that Joseph first reached the place called Farma which is on the border of present-day Egypt, and that the family stayed at the place presently known as Hamam, close to Sagsig, seventy-two miles north of modern Cairo. During the Christmas season in remembrance of this sojourn the Christians of Egypt often assemble in suburban Cairo near an old sycamore tree, commonly known as “St. Mary's tree.” Here they have prayers, meditations, and these are accompanied by the observance of exaggerated local customs that have emerged during the centuries.

The earliest social experiences of Jesus as a young boy may have exposed him to a cosmopolitan world where, in addition to Aramaic, fluency in Greek and some familiarity with Latin would have been part of his everyday experiences. However, we have only the most exaggerated tradition on which to rely for the length of time the family sojourned in Egypt. Then the Bible says, “When Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead which sought the young child’s life” (Matthew 2:19, 20). Since the record is that they returned during the reign of Herod’s son Archelaus (Matthew 2:22), they certainly had returned by the time our Lord was seven years old, for Archelaus was deposed by Rome in 6 A.D. for exceptionally poor rulership. Matthew (in 2:15) observes that this sojourn was a fulfillment of the prophecy, “Out of Egypt have I called my son” (Hosea 11:1).

### **The Return to Nazareth**

Nazareth lies in a secluded basin in the rocky Galilean hills above the fertile lands of the Great Plain. It is identified with the modern village en-Nazirah. The hill country around Nazareth hardly welcomed a town at all. Its only resource was a spring of good water which probably first drew people to the site and kept them there. By hard work they cleared the ground for small plots where crops and vines could grow. Although Nazareth is not mentioned by name in the Old Testament, it would be in the district allotted to the tribe of Zebulun during the division of the land. Nazareth is located in Galilee, about sixty-five miles north of Jerusalem, about halfway between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. To the south is the Plain of Esdraelon; across is Megiddo, or Armageddon. In the time of Jesus, Nazareth, with its few hundred people, was nothing more than a town of small farms and vineyards. “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” asked a guileless Israelite (John 1:46,47).

The people of Nazareth were all religious Jews devoted to their traditions and their synagogue. Rather than live on choicer land next to Gentile neighbors, as Jews did in so many other towns in Galilee, or in prosperous Greek cities like Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee, the Jews of Nazareth dwelt in remote hills where they could live as Jews without interference from outsiders. Nazareth was the original home of Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:39). It was in Nazareth that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce the coming birth of Christ (Luke 1:26-28). Joseph and Mary lived there for a few short months after their marriage, and it was from there they went south to Bethlehem to register for the census. We can be sure that when the family returned, Nazareth presented a stark contrast to the cosmopolitan experiences they had had in Egypt.

As Jesus grew, he would have worked hard with Joseph in the family carpentry business. It was in Nazareth that Jesus “grew in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52) until he began his ministry at the synagogue there. One of the greatest ironies about Nazareth is that, although it is now world-famous as the Savior’s hometown, the people of his time held him in low regard, to the point of contempt and even outright hostility. No miracles were performed there. The situation eventually became so contentious that Jesus was twice forced to leave town; once he was nearly thrown over the town’s cliff by a mob.

Jesus went to Capernaum on the north coast of the Sea of Galilee: “A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house” (Matthew 13:57).

Matthew preserves some rich details about the early life of our Lord. He specifically calls attention to passages of Old Testament prophecy that are linked to our Lord’s early life and ministry. These remind us to consider the broader application of texts that may at first seem specific and focused. We may use Matthew as a guide to deliberately seek insight into the deeper meaning of the Scriptures. Without Matthew’s illumination, these unseen riches of Christ’s life would remain hidden. Matthew leads us through these otherwise baffling texts so we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and see that the heavenly Father’s providential watch care over his son is the same watch care we are receiving as his children.

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1.. *Reprints*, p. 4098. “Zarathustra” is sometimes known by the Greek form “Zoroaster.” Caution is counseled in accepting the scholarship cited in support of this conclusion.

2. A. Bode, *Songs of Zarathustra*, George Allen, London, 1952, p. 83; (Yasna 46:3-9).

3. William Filmer, *The Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great*, J. Theol. Stud. 17, 2, p. 283-298, 1966.

4. Alfred Edershiem, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, Longmans, New York, 1896, p. 215.

## The Sermon on the Mount

### The Beatitudes and More

*The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.—John 7:46*

*Homer Montague*

Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount is recorded in Matthew chapters 5 through 7. It is a widely held belief that it sets forth needed guidelines and behaviors for Christians during this Gospel age: "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). Those who heeded this admonition of Jesus gave evidence of a readiness to receive further instructions contained in the lessons under consideration.

#### Character Transformation

The first portion of this discourse addressed a series of beatitudes or blessings, illustrating the transformation of character to be manifested by those who would be acceptable to God as participants with Christ in his kingdom.

**Humility:** Poverty of spirit was exhibited by Jesus to the degree that he willingly submitted himself to his Father's will in every particular—even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:7,8). This quality was in direct opposition to the pride exhibited by Lucifer whose desire was to be exalted (Isaiah 14:12-15). Those who would become associates with the master during his glorious reign must first acknowledge their spiritual insufficiency and need of redemption. As they acquiesce to the instructions found in God's word they will then have their hearts revived and begin to walk in righteousness (Isaiah 5:7-15).

**Sympathetic Mourning:** This trait might well be illustrated by the compassion manifested toward others who are experiencing grief as opposed to feelings of self-pity resulting from personal difficulties and adversity. Prior to his crucifixion, Jesus wept over Jerusalem. The people of Israel had little appreciation for the special divine blessings that would have been theirs as a nation of kings and priests, and because of hardness of heart this grand offer was withdrawn (Matthew 23:37-39). For the footstep followers of Jesus there are many opportunities to enter into the sorrows of others, and offer comfort as preparation for the future work in the kingdom of helping to wipe away mankind's tears.

**Meekness:** The Lord invited those who would be his disciples to emulate him as he said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

The master was gentle or approachable in his dealings with children, publicans, sinners, and all with whom he came in contact. Even when he was shamefully treated, he did not retaliate: "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened

not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:23). Christ’s followers are called upon to suffer for righteousness, and through the power of the holy spirit they will be enabled to manifest this quality of gentleness. A worthy admonition for saints is, “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:24,25).

**Desire for Righteousness:** The Scriptures declare concerning Jesus, “For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26). Those who follow the Lord are being selected to be a part of his bride and therefore must be made completely pure to be acceptable for this role. Although covered by the imputed robe of Christ’s righteousness, spirit-begotten believers are not actually perfect in the flesh and repeatedly need to go to the throne of heavenly grace for forgiveness of their trespasses. Nevertheless, they are required to strive against their inherited weaknesses and sinful propensities. They must love righteousness and hate iniquity to such a degree that their heart intentions will always strive for holiness of thought, word, and deed.

**Mercifulness:** Those who will share in the work of restoring mankind during the kingdom of Christ must be merciful. As kings and priests they will be dealing with fallen mankind who will need great assistance to recover from the sinful condition in which they entered the tomb. The order of that time will be justice tempered with mercy, so that the human family can be educated in righteousness under the mediatorial rule while being brought up to perfection. The Gospel age saints have been objects of divine mercy in that they have been invited to undergo a transformation process from their sinful condition to become new creatures in Christ. If rightly exercised by their experiences, they ultimately will become part of that sympathetic high priest that will be empowered to extend mercy to all the human families during the reign of righteousness.

**Purity of Heart:** The impact of the holy spirit upon the believer is such that it drives away worldliness, subterfuge, or anything that reflects an unholy attitude. Purity of the flesh cannot be attained in this life because of human imperfections. Through the redemptive merit of Christ’s sacrifice, however, the followers of Jesus strive against their weaknesses and blemishes, thereby attesting to the true desire of their will. As they see the holy standard of thought and conduct as exemplified in the Scriptures, they wage a vigorous warfare against sin in their flesh and seek assistance repeatedly from the throne of heavenly grace, to demonstrate their intentions are in harmony with the will of God and all his arrangements. The awesome prospect of actually seeing the heavenly Father in glory is almost unspeakable, but it will be attained by those whose heart loyalty toward righteousness is unwavering.

**Peacemaking:** The Lord’s followers are to seek and pursue peace in their lives. They may especially rejoice in the opportunities provided whereby they can help to calm troublesome situations, as opposed to engendering strife. There are many ills and injustices in the world over which believers have limited impact. However, there are times when the word of reconciliation may appropriately be interjected, both among

brethren and others outside the fellowship. A word in season aptly spoken may prove to be invaluable in bringing calm to a situation that otherwise might get out of control. The lessons learned and applied now will prove valuable to the saints when they actually engage in a ministry of reconciliation during the glorious Millennial reign of The Christ.

**Joyful Endurance of Persecution:** The ability to manifest this attribute gives evidence of a high degree of spirituality. Revilings and false accusations are always unpleasant to the flesh. Only the new creature can appreciate such treatment because it realizes that to endure evil for Christ's sake is an evidence of loyalty to God, and is credited as a sin-offering experience. The concept of unmerited suffering by believers is further expanded upon in Scripture as we read, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you. ... If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Peter 4:14-16).

### Other Themes

The disciples of Christ are to be "the salt of the earth." Their lives should have a preservative influence upon the world which otherwise would be even more depraved than it is. If believers fail to live out the high character standards exemplified in the beatitudes, however, their testimony would have little positive impact upon mankind. Similarly, Christians are to be the light of the world just as Jesus was that great light that came into the world (John 8:12). Individually and collectively believers must let their light shine, and by their good works emulate the character of the master and glorify the heavenly Father.

Another theme found in the Sermon on the Mount relates to Christ and the Mosaic Law. Through his faithfulness in keeping every feature of the law perfectly and by laying down his humanity in sacrifice, benefitting the Jews first and later the Gentiles, all who accept the terms of discipleship (Matthew 16:24) have an opportunity to become a part of the spiritual seed of Abraham through whom all the families of the earth will receive restitution blessings (Galatians 3:27-29). A high standard of righteous living is required to participate in this arrangement.

It was evident that Jesus' teachings were of a different order than those proclaimed by the Pharisees in such matters as anger, adultery, and divorce. The Pharisees held to the letter of the law, knowing that killing others was forbidden (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17), and such an act would require the offender to be brought to judgment. Jesus, however, equated anger and hatred with murder even if actual killing did not occur. Additionally, the calling of one's brother a fool was an extremely serious matter that could lead to dire consequences for the offender. Improper feelings toward one's brother should be promptly settled because failure to do so is not acceptable to the Lord. In looking at all these issues, although Jesus' ministry occurred prior to Pentecost, it is evident these lessons were meant for consecrated believers, spiritual Israelites.

The Mosaic Law prohibited adultery (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18). Jesus stressed inward purity and the need to crucify any such desires even if the actual act was not

committed: “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:29). A disciplined life of self-control is emphasized as needful for believers and seems to be the point made regarding the cutting off of offending members of one’s body (Matthew 5:30).

As part of the law, divorce was permitted because of incompatibility (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Again, the master introduces a higher standard for believers in which he forbade divorce except in the case of sexual infidelity even though he did not command that divorce had to occur in such an instance. His instructions also prohibit marriage or remarriage to anyone previously found guilty of adultery. However, application of the master’s counsel concerning these matters is not followed uniformly by all believers. Additional considerations regarding these topics are found in some writings by the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 7:8-17,39).

Another issue Jesus addressed was the use of oaths to emphasize the truthfulness of statements made. The Jews knew from the law that one should not take God’s name in vain but evidently attempted to circumvent the third commandment by swearing by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or even one’s head (Matthew 5:34-36). Oaths should be unnecessary for Christians as there are no circumstances under which it would be proper to tell a falsehood: “But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation” (James 5:12).

To the worldly wise, one of the peculiarities of Jesus’ admonitions was the principle of non-retaliation for evil. The teaching of an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth was well established in the Old Testament (Exodus 21:24; Deuteronomy 19:21) although authority for meting out retribution lay in the hands of established authorities rather than the individual. When injury is inflicted upon a believer, he may use any lawful means to obtain redress but it would violate the spirit of Christ to render evil for evil. At the same time the example of removing one’s self from harm’s way is well illustrated by Paul’s appeal to have his case heard by Caesar rather than to return to Jerusalem for trial, which undoubtedly would have resulted in his physical harm or death en route by those who hated him (Acts 25:9-12).

One of the evidences of a regenerated heart is the ability to love one’s enemies. Additionally, believers are called upon to do good to those who persecute them. Both of these qualities are impossible to achieve without receiving divine aid through an increasing measure of the holy spirit, prayer, and by patiently endeavoring to imitate Christ by a willingness to suffer reproach with him. By studying the principles of truth outlined in Scripture and noting the selflessness of Jesus in laying down his life to benefit all mankind, disciples who obediently follow the master will take increasing pleasure from each evidence that they are overcoming the spirit of the world, the flesh, and the adversary. Such growth will motivate them to fulfill these commands as evidence of their supreme love for God.



Matthew chapter 6 commences with a reminder that unselfishness is absolutely necessary to receive divine favor. The act of giving to others in sincerity and without desiring public approval, as opposed to seeking commendation from fellow men, is an evidence of heart purity. In the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9-14) this quality was obviously lacking in the Pharisee who boasted of his various achievements, but from God's standpoint he was found wanting.

### **The Importance of Prayer**

Several verses are devoted to the subject of prayer. Such petitions should not be in the form of vain repetitions as practiced by some of the heathen. Prayer is a privilege and instruction concerning the basis for acceptable prayers is necessary: "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3).

In response to his disciples' request, Jesus gave an example of a proper form of petition that is commonly called "The Lord's Prayer." It is characterized by simplicity, brevity, and reverence. It acknowledges the sovereignty of God and ascribes honor and praise to the Creator. This is followed by an expression of confidence that divine authority will be manifested in the establishment of a kingdom on earth with conditions that are in harmony with the righteousness existing in the heavenly domain.

After giving priority to God's interests, personal needs are presented, acknowledging dependence upon the heavenly Father for sustenance. Although "daily bread" is usually associated with temporal provisions, the need for spiritual food to sustain believers should be the main intent of this request. In requesting forgiveness, emphasis is again placed upon the quality of mercy that should be manifested by Christians toward others who may offend. The inability of the Lord's people to perform perfectly in their actions and a continual need to seek divine forgiveness for transgressions should cultivate compassion and sympathy for others in their hearts.

In view of personal weaknesses and failings under trial, believers may pray not to be abandoned in such situations, but to receive grace sufficient for the occasion and not lean on their own strength. Similarly, recognition that there is an evil one is a reminder not to trust self but to call upon the Lord for safety and deliverance.

Throughout the master's discourse, he decried any form of hypocrisy that was so prevalent among the Pharisees. The following quote concerning fasting is in harmony with Jesus' expression on the subject.

"Fasting is specially commendable to the Lord's people at times when they find themselves lacking in spirituality and exposed to severe temptations from the world, the flesh and the devil; for by impoverishing the physical force and vitality, it may assist the full-blooded and impulsive to self-control, in every direction. We believe that a majority of Christians would be helped by occasional fasting, a very plain diet for a season, if not total abstinence. But fastings, to be seen and known of men or to be conjured up in our own minds as marks of piety on our part, would be injurious indeed, and lead to spiritual



pride and hypocrisy which would far outweigh their advantages to us in the way of self-restraint.”—*Reprints*, p. 2260

The balance of Matthew 6 contains some of the most powerful teaching of the Lord with respect to how much importance believers should place upon the acquisition of earthly treasures. Anything that one values becomes a treasure, including wealth, earthly friendships, power, family relationships, social distinction, etc. True Christians place their attention upon heavenly treasures to which the spirit of sanctification leads. There are some worthwhile earthly treasures that might be pursued but, inasmuch as one cannot serve two masters simultaneously, such desires must be subservient to fulfilling the terms of discipleship which involve self-denial and cross bearing (Matthew 16:24). The apostle Paul could confidently claim at the end of his course a crown of righteousness awaited him because he had set his affections upon the things above (2 Timothy 4:7,8).

As an impetus to prevent anxious care on the part of his followers, Jesus gave as an example the birds of the air; they did not worry whether God would provide for their needs. It should be noted, however, that was not a prohibition against putting forth effort to secure things needful for oneself and family. The concept of going to extraordinary means to obtain future personal security apart from God, however, seems well illustrated in the parable of the rich man who knew no limits to his desire and ultimately lost all in death (Luke 12:16-21).

In another illustration, Jesus said the beauty of the lilies exceeded that of Solomon’s elegant apparel, and that instead of striving for an accumulation of material goods, believers should seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all other necessary things would be provided according to the Father’s will (Matthew 6:28-34). The Lord in his earthly sojourn followed that course unto death. His followers, if faithful, will do the same.

### **Judging Others**

In the opening verses of Matthew chapter 7, the Lord gives explicit instructions to the household of faith that they should not judge others. The word “judge” comes from Strong’s 2919 and includes among its definitions such meanings as try, punish, and condemn. Recognizing that it is impossible to read anyone’s heart or to be certain as to the motives behind someone’s deeds or words, any faultfinding or rendering harsh judgment of others shows a lack of mercifulness. When we recognize “there is none righteous, no not one,” how important it is to remove the beam from one’s own eye before attempting to remove a speck from the eye of another (Matthew 7:3-5). As with the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, this admonition is for brethren in Christ and not for the world of mankind who do not seek to follow the master.

However, it is possible and Scripturally appropriate to make certain judgments or to exercise the spirit of discernment without condemning or speaking evil of others. Two such examples would include examining doctrinal teachings of leaders (1 John 4:1) and determining who are qualified to be church servants (1 Timothy 3:1-13). Also, the

ecclesia has the responsibility to make determinations if serious disputes between brethren have occurred or if moral issues require disciplinary action (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

Following the master's reference to judging, there is a lesson as to the importance of diligence in self-examination as well as seeking the Lord's will and more of the holy spirit. It is quite humbling to seriously consider the details found in the Sermon on the Mount because all honest-hearted followers of Jesus will find they come short of the high standards of righteous conduct in various areas. Disciples are encouraged to seek the ways and will of God through persistency in study and prayer. The Lord gives assurance that the loving heavenly Father will reward such efforts far beyond what an earthly parent would do for his child: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12). This verse, commonly known as the golden rule, expresses the means by which believers can examine their own actions, especially with their fellow brethren. When the meaning of this passage is internalized, the Lord's disciples will be aided in their Christian walk because they keenly realize the pain they would experience if the situation were reversed and their brethren were condemning or speaking evil of them. How sobering it is to realize the stringent requirements of the narrow way.

Earlier in this chapter it was noted that judging others in the sense of condemning them is unmerciful. Nevertheless, as the lifestyle of Christians is seen, those who have the spirit of discernment should be able to determine whether they have the spirit of sacrifice and whether their fruitage reflects the qualities contained in the beatitudes. If they bring forth good fruit and their teachings and example are in accordance with Scriptural principles, they may be supported and encouraged. If their fruitage manifests the works of the flesh, the Lord will reject them. A Scriptural standard for contrasting works of the flesh with the fruit of the spirit is set forth with great clarity by the apostle Paul in Galatians 5:19-23.

The Sermon on the Mount concludes with a description of those who build upon the rock, Christ Jesus, and set forth the necessary doctrinal foundation, faith structure, and character likeness to be developed as revealed in God's word. This contrasts with those who build upon the sand of human traditions, theories, and false doctrines, which do not have a sanctifying effect. As the Gospel age closes, there are increasing trials and tests upon all who profess to be the Lord's followers. Those who are fully consecrated and obedient to the Lord's will shall withstand these tests and be rewarded appropriately. Others who have not understood nor appreciated the high standards and privileges of discipleship will be exposed in fulfillment of the prophet's words: "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place" (Isaiah 28:17).

As we apply the lessons taught in these exhortations from the Lord that also are expanded upon in other related Scriptures, may our daily conduct show that we are "doers of the word and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

## Matthew 26-28

# Death and Resurrection

*We have not followed cunningly devised fables.—2 Peter 1:16*

*Michael Nekora*

In the last chapters of his description of the death of Jesus Christ Matthew mentions six events that are not in the accounts of the other gospel writers:

1. The amount of money paid to Judas, and his subsequent suicide.
2. The dream of Pilate's wife.
3. The "rising up" of the bodies of saints when Jesus died.
4. The sepulchral guard.
5. The resurrection morning earthquake.
6. The alternate explanation for the disappearance of the body.

### Judas

Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.—Matthew 26:14-16

Although Mark (14:10,11) and Luke (22:3-6) say Judas conspired with the chief priests to deliver Jesus unto them, only Matthew states that they paid "thirty pieces of silver" for him. Why did Judas want to betray Jesus? Money is an unlikely motive. He carried the group's funds in a bag and stole whatever he wanted (John 12:6). An alternate conjecture is that Judas felt more and more threatened by his guilty conscience and the master's implied condemnation of him as he spoke to the crowds around him. For example, Jesus uses the word "hypocrites" fourteen times in Matthew's gospel, usually when speaking of the scribes and Pharisees. Judas would have heard the master say, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, this people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:7,8). If Jesus then turned and looked directly at Judas, one can only imagine the reaction. Judas might well say to himself, "If Jesus were to die—and he does talk about his death—this thorn in my side would go away." He could then apply the usual salve for a guilty conscience: a short memory.

Why would the chief priests do business with Judas? They had all the power. What could Judas do for them? Luke tells us that Judas "sought opportunity to deliver him unto them in the absence of the multitude" (Luke 22:6). That was what the chief priests needed. The common people loved Jesus. Only a few days earlier they had shouted as he rode into Jerusalem, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matthew 21:9). Just before Satan took control of Judas Luke writes, "And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people" (Luke 22:2). The unexpected appearance of Judas, perhaps the only one of the twelve not from Galilee and thus more acceptable to them, would solve a

big problem for the chief priests. He could tell them where to go and what to do without the common people knowing about it.

The thirty pieces of silver is mentioned again when Judas has second thoughts about what he has done:

Then Judas, which had betrayeth him, when he saw that he [Jesus] was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.—Matthew 27:3-5

Matthew is the only gospel writer who says Judas committed suicide, although it is mentioned in Acts 1:18,19. Matthew goes on to speak about the dilemma caused by the return of the money:

And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.—Matthew 27:7-10

The *Companion Bible* in Appendix 161 discusses at length this transaction of the chief priests and compares it to the field where Judas died. The evidence suggests it was two different fields. The priests bought a field after Judas was dead. Judas hung himself on his own property, something that would have been known afterward. It was probably then that the eleven realized he had been stealing from the “bag” and investing the proceeds in real estate. He could not wear better clothes, eat better food, or do any of the things people with money usually do. But he could “invest in his retirement.” Then, as now, real estate was one such investment.

The assertion that the thirty pieces of silver was “spoken by Jeremy [Jeremiah] the prophet” has been perplexing since there is nothing in the book of Jeremiah even remotely associated with such a phrase. Perhaps the *Companion Bible*'s suggestion is as good as any. It notes that Matthew says it was **spoken** by Jeremiah, not **written**. Consequently we have no basis to be disappointed that the words are not found in Jeremiah's written words.

### **Pilate's Wife**

When he [Pilate] was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.—Matthew 27:19

How did Pilate's wife know what was happening at the distant judgment hall? This is one of three subtle clues that the chief priests met with Pilate the night before to be sure he would agree to carry out their verdict of death. Although granted much autonomy by Rome, local authorities could not directly execute anyone (though an out-of-control mob might do so illegally, as they did at the stoning of Stephen). The chief priests needed Pilate's cooperation or there would be no crucifixion. Favors were constantly being traded between the Roman governor and the chief priests, and this was a time when the chief priests needed a big one.

If Pilate's wife witnessed the conversation between her husband and the priests, it is not surprising she dreamed about it. And that dream alarmed her so much she sent word to her husband to not participate in this evil scheme.

Other evidence of prior collusion is suggested in words recorded in John: "Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee" (John 18:29-30).

The priests could not come into Pilate's judgment hall because they would become ceremonially unclean and be unable to eat the Passover when the sun went down. How could they be so sure Pilate would come out to them? Would it not be more likely a Roman governor would demand that they either come in to him or go away? And when he asks what charges they bring against Jesus, they show no deference to Pilate's authority and power. To say that if Jesus had not been a criminal, they would not be there, is condescending, hardly the words of the powerless in front of the powerful. But it would be just what might be said by those who thought they had a prior agreement. They could not afford to have Pilate back out now.

Pilate was no match for the cunning priests who had complete control over their crowd, which undoubtedly consisted of employees of the temple, people who were beholden to the priests for their jobs. There is no evidence that those shouting for Jesus' death were the same as those who had enthusiastically welcomed him into Jerusalem a few days earlier. Those shouting for Jesus' death were hand-picked for the occasion. Notice the difference between them and those who were on the road to Calvary: "There followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him" (Luke 23:27).

### **Raising the Bodies of Saints**

Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.—Matthew 27:50-53

Mark and Luke also say the veil of the temple was rent, but only Matthew speaks about an earthquake, and a raising of saints. This has been a perplexing text since clearly no

resurrection of humans could occur until the one with the power of life and death, Jesus himself, had been resurrected. That was yet three days in the future. So what happened?

“Around Jerusalem there are numerous tombs, many of them remarkable for their beauty, their size, their peculiar structure. Almost all of these are Jewish and give us a good idea of ‘how the manner of the Jews was to bury.’ Whoever could afford it chose the rock, not the earth, for the covering of his body, and preferred to have his body deposited on a clean, rocky shelf, not let down into and covered over with the soil. Hence our ideas of burial are not the same as those of the Jews.”—McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. X, p. 458.

The earthquake dislodged the contents of the tombs and bodies within them were thrown up and out. There was no resurrection nor walking around by these bodies, though the translators of the King James Bible might have thought there was. Since there is neither verse division nor punctuation in the original Greek text, a possible solution is to render the original text this way:

“... the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves.” [End of verse 52, start verse 53] “After his resurrection, [he] went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.”

The Greek word translated “many” sometimes means everyone (Matthew 20:28) and sometimes more than a few (Matthew 9:10). Certainly Jesus did go into the holy city and appeared to some after his resurrection.

### **Guarding the Sepulcher**

Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.—Matthew 27:62-66

Setting a guard at the tomb is described only by Matthew. Though they were not to know it at the time, by insisting that the tomb be guarded, the chief priests were to make matters worse for themselves. Because Pilate had had more than enough of this entire affair, he refused to send his own Roman soldiers to do the job. The priests were told to use the temple guard to be sure the body stayed in the sepulcher where it had been placed.

And so the guards took their places. Because this was the “next day,” likely they rolled back the stone to verify the body was still there lest **they** be accused of dereliction of duty if there was no body at some later time. Then early on the third day there was another earthquake. It rolled away the stone, not to let Jesus out, but to let his faithful followers

in. At the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem there is a channel along the ground where a disk-like stone could be rolled to seal the entrance to the tomb.<sup>1</sup>

### **A Second Earthquake**

In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.—Matthew 28:1-4

The other three gospel writers say that when the women arrived at the tomb, they found the stone had been rolled away. They do not say who did it or what happened to the guards who were to keep anyone from stealing the body. Because there had been guards, there now was a big problem. How could the body disappear since they were explicitly ordered to keep this from happening? Once they were committed to denying the plain truth of who Jesus was, there could be no turning back for the chief priests. They entered into a conspiracy with the guards to explain the disappearance, and only Matthew records it.

### **The Conspiracy**

Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.—Matthew 28:11-15

Everyone knew a sleeping soldier would be severely punished for such gross incompetence. How could the chief priests invent a story which on its face is so preposterous? Yet what else could they do? The great rejoicing on the part of the chief priests, and undoubtedly in the courts of Satan himself, had changed so dramatically that events were spiraling out of control. Decisions had to be made, and made quickly. Today this is called “damage control” and Matthew is the only one to speak of it.

The testimony of Matthew about the death and resurrection of Jesus contains many rich details missing from the other gospel accounts. Matthew writes with authority as he describes what happened. What he has recorded for us beautifully illustrates what the apostle Peter said near the end of his life when reflecting on his experience with the master: “We have not followed cunningly devised fables ... but were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16)..

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1, On the other hand Gabriel Barkey writing in the March-April, 1986, *Biblical Archaeology Review* presents evidence for the Garden Tomb being a much older, eighth to seventh century B.C. tomb.



## Short Subjects

### Matthew the Publican

“Matthew, elsewhere styled Levi, was called to be one of the twelve apostles. He was a publican—that is to say, a collector of taxes for the Roman government. Publicans were despised for two reasons:— (1) It was considered very disreputable to assist a foreign government to collect taxes from one’s friends—kin. (2) Many of these publicans were rascally and took advantage of their position to make themselves wealthy through bribes, over-collections, etc. We may be sure that Matthew-Levi was not of the dishonest type, else he never would have been called to association with Messiah as one of his apostles and prospective joint-heirs with him in his kingdom. For such position the highest degree of honesty is requisite. And if Jesus would never call a dishonest man, neither would a dishonest man have accepted his call, because there was nothing to be gained—neither reputation, wages nor fraud.”—*Reprints*, p. 4587.

It is worthy of note that Matthew tells us of himself that he was a publican (Matthew 10:3), while none of the other evangelists make this comment, doubtless because the occupation of a publican was considered a very dishonorable one—unpatriotic. [He] was known by the name of Levi, while he was the publican (Luke 5:27), but his name was changed when he changed his occupation and became a member of the Lord’s company. His new name, Matthew, signified “the gift of God,” just as Simon, the son of Jonas, had a new name given to him, namely, Peter, “a rock.” But how great a change the gospel of the kingdom produced upon Matthew, to lead him to forsake all—the profitable income of his occupation, leaving it to others—and to become a follower of the despised Nazarene! The influence of the fact that our Lord would accept a publican to be his disciple, was far-reaching, and no doubt inspired an interest in our Lord amongst the degraded and outcast classes. We are not surprised, therefore, when we are told shortly afterward, that many publicans and sinners resorted to our Lord, and gave ear to his teachings. Nor did he treat them after the manner of the scribes and Pharisees, but on the contrary received them as the children of Abraham—as some of the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

—*Reprints*, p. 2260.



## How Men Followed Jesus

When Jesus had finished these words, having spoken them in Galilee about Capernaum, “He departed thence, and came into the borders of Judaea” which were different from Galilee (see Matthew 19:1,2). He came to the **borders** of Judaea, not to the middle of it, but, as it were, to the outermost parts where great multitudes followed him, whom he healed at “the borders of Judaea beyond Jordan,” where baptism had been given.

Observe the difference between the crowds who simply followed, and Peter and the others who gave up everything and followed. Matthew arose and followed him (Matthew 9:9); he did not simply follow. “He arose” is an important addition. There are always those who follow like the great multitudes who have not arisen that they may follow, nor have they given up all that was theirs formerly. Few are they who have arisen and followed, who also, in the regeneration, shall sit on twelve thrones. Only if one wishes to be healed, let him follow Jesus.

—Origen (on Matthew’s call)

## And Finally

### We Three Kings of Orient Are

We three kings of Orient are,  
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,  
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,  
Following yonder star.

O, star of wonder, star of might,  
Star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading, still proceeding,  
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Born a babe on Bethlehem's plain;  
Gold we bring to crown him again;  
King forever, ceasing never,  
Over us all to reign.

Frankincense to offer have I;  
Incense owns our redeemer nigh;  
Prayer and praising, all men raising,  
Worship him, who came to die.

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume  
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;  
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,  
Seal'd in the stone-cold tomb.

Glorious now behold him arise,  
King and Lord and sacrifice,  
Heaven sings, "Hallelujah!"  
"Hallelujah!" earth replies.

*Words & Music by John H. Hopkins, Jr.*

*Hopkins wrote this work as part of a Christmas pageant  
for the General Theological Seminary in New York City in 1857.*

# News and Views

## Pastoral Bible Institute News

### Religious

Newspaper reporter, author, and former atheist Lee Strobel, has created a new TV show called “Faith under fire” to be shown on the Pax network. It will involve persons from different faith groups debating religious beliefs. For example, one episode shows two religious scholars debating whether hell exists. Strobel said: “No topic is off-limits. ... The point [of the show] is to really look at the evidence and where it points. For example, Islam and Christianity can’t both be right—they are either both wrong, or one of them is right. We wanted to talk to people about why they believe what they believe and examine what evidence they have for it.”

—The Hartford Courant, 10/1/2004

The Russian Secret Police in the early 20th century forged a document called “The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion.” It was based on an earlier French novel, and was promoted as evidence of an international Jewish conspiracy to rule the world. It is still circulated by some rabidly anti-Semitic groups, and is referred to by the media in some Muslim countries. It is available from Amazon.com and other online bookstores, which inform their buyers that the book is an anti-Semitic forgery.

—ReligiousTolerance.org website, 9/21/2004

In its first week of recruiting, Iran registered at least 10,000 young volunteers for “martyrdom operations” against Israel and U.S. forces in Iraq, according to the recruitment group, the Committee for the Commemoration of Martyrs of the Global Islamic Campaign. The calls to join the Army of Martyrs began in mosques, after which registration forms were distributed by the tens of thousands at local Islamic universities to prospective male and female suicide attackers.

—International Jerusalem Post, 9/30/2004

Explosions that damaged five churches in Baghdad have prompted some Christians to wonder whether it’s time to leave their ancient homeland. ... Thousands of Christians have already left the country since the fall of Saddam’s regime and Saturday’s bombings were unwelcome news to the remaining Christians, about 3 per cent of Iraq’s population.

—The Age (Australia), 10/18/2004

Nearly three years after the Taliban left Herat, Afghanistan, ending almost six years of repressive rule, millions of women are reentering the workforce. Eighty percent of women cannot read and do not work outside the home. Kobra Zeithi works for Habitat, the United Nations Center for Human Settlement. “We can work freely, comfortably now,” with men, she said. Ms. Zeithi said she could go anywhere provided she wears the Islamic veil. The restrictions on women now come from the men in their families, some of whom seem to have internalized the Taliban’s dictates.

—New York Times, 10/17/2004

## **Social**

After more than two decades of research, scientists said they had found the first effective vaccine against malaria. Trials in Africa showed that the vaccine blocked almost half of new infections in young children and reduced serious disease by nearly 60%. Experts termed the results a major breakthrough in efforts to tame a disease that afflicts 400 million people each year, killing 1 million to 3 million—most of them children in Africa. Malaria is the leading killer of children under age 5 and ranks with AIDS and tuberculosis on the list of the world’s most lethal diseases.

—Los Angeles Times, 10/15/2004

In 2002 African Americans accounted for half of all new AIDS cases, and Latinos accounted for 20% according to the Centers for Disease Control. In the United States AIDS kills more black men between 25 and 44 than any other disease. More than a quarter of AIDS cases are now women, most of whom are black or Latina. Black females 15 and older are 15½ times more likely to die of AIDS than whites.

—Los Angeles Times, 10/16/2004

Haiti’s death toll from Tropical Storm Jeanne’s devastating floods rose to 3,006 as government officials released what they believe is the final tally. Jeanne lashed the Caribbean nation with rains that triggered massive flooding and mudslides and washed away whole villages. The toll climbed steadily as rescue workers [explored] remote areas and recovered bodies buried in mud. Those missing since the floods struck are presumed dead.

—Los Angeles Times 10/6/2004

Across Iraq, black-market pharmacists are roiling the country’s already-fragile health-care system, prompting authorities to launch a major effort to put them out of business. Officials at the Ministry of Health say that hundreds of Iraqis have fallen sick and dozens have died after taking drugs that were either contaminated, mislabeled or had expired. The existence of a thriving underground market for drugs and medicines is also being blamed for numerous instances of fraud and theft inside Iraq’s vast network of state-owned pharmaceutical warehouses.

—Wall Street Journal, 9/2/2004

U.S. climate researchers working at the edge of Peru's Quelccaya ice cap discovered a long-frozen specimen of *Distichia muscoides*. Carbon dating showed this particular plant was 5,177 years old give or take 50 years. The botanical find is a potent symbol of twentieth century global warming. The Quelccaya is the world's largest tropical glacier and sits only 14 degrees south of the equator, but at 18,600 feet above sea level it often gets snow and never rain. Yet today, the 7½ mile-long mountain glacier is disappearing fast. It's losing about 100 feet a year, at a rate that is now about 40 times what it was in the 1970s. Its true that glaciers ebb and flow with the years, but the age of the ancient plant points to just how unusual today's melting is.

—Science Journal, 10/22/2004

A government agency warned of a “potential famine” in Ethiopia during 2005, saying food shortages could affect up to 12 million people and the crisis, which could hit the country by the end of 2004, has worsened due to inadequate rainfall and a gradual loss of farmers' assets. The government's emergency arm, the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission, said earlier that “signs of malnutrition” and a deteriorating situation in many parts of the country were imminent. The United Nations said that 35 countries around the world, including 23 African nations, are experiencing food shortages. It also noted Ethiopia is facing “unfavorable prospects” for crops this year. In 2002, Ethiopia was hit by a serious crisis that left 14 million people dependent on food handouts.

—AllAfrica.com, 11/2/2004

## **Political**

Former Mossad agent Gad Shimron reports that while the European Union attacks Israel for the partition fence it is building, the EU itself funds and operates a similar fence designed only to protect itself from illegal immigrants. The fence is located in a Spanish enclave in northwestern Africa, the coastal city of Ceuta just across the Straits of Gibraltar from Spain. Unknown to most of the world, when Spain handed over most of northern Morocco to the newly independent kingdom in 1956, Spain retained Ceuta and Melilla. Poverty stricken Moroccans attempting to cross into Ceuta, from where they will then be able to work anywhere in Europe, are stopped in their tracks by an eight-meter-high, double layer fence.

—Arutz 7, Sept. 2004 (exact date unknown)

Iran added a “strategic missile” to its military arsenal after a successful test, and the defense minister said his country was ready to confront any external threat. Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani ... refused to give details about the missile for “security reasons,” but he said Iran was “ready to confront all regional and extra-regional threats.” Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said Iran is a worldwide threat whose missiles can reach London, Paris, and southern Russia. Earlier this month, Israel said it was buying from the U.S. about 5,000 smart bombs, including 500 1-ton bunker-busters, which can destroy 6-foot-thick concrete walls. Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi has warned that Tehran will react “most severely” to any Israeli strike against its nuclear facilities.

—Associated Press, 9/25/2004

Hungary announced that it would withdraw its 300 troops from Iraq, becoming the latest country to bring its soldiers home. The United States had persuaded 32 countries to provide 22,000 soldiers as part of the multinational force established to stabilize postwar Iraq. Spain ... Dominican Republic ... Nicaragua ... Honduras ... the Philippines ... Norway [have all withdrawn their forces]. Poland, the fourth-largest contributor, with 2,400 troops, says it intends to withdraw by the end of next year, and the Netherlands, with 1,400 troops, said that the latest rotation of troops would be its last contribution to Iraq.

—International Herald Tribune, 11/4/2004

## **Financial**

The U.S. National Weather Bureau and the Australian Bureau of Meteorology are warning of a possible El Niño, in which sea surface temperatures in the Pacific Basin remain warmer than usual and create worldwide climate changes. In Southeast Asia, a strong El Niño would likely trigger a drought that could wreak havoc with the region’s key agricultural industries. Whether Asia gets a serious El Niño or none this year, market watchers are starting to consider how the sometimes devastating weather phenomenon might affect prices of grain, cattle, palm oil, sugar and other commodities. El Niño normally occurs once every five to six years.

—Wall Street Journal, 9/1/2004

The borrowing boom has produced one disturbing trend—a six-fold increase in personal bankruptcies since 1980. Bankruptcy filings reached a record 1.625 million last year. Two decades ago they totaled 288,000. “We’ve allowed bankruptcy to become commonplace in America,” said Elizabeth Warren, a Harvard Law School professor. “Last year more people filed for bankruptcy than filed for divorce or were diagnosed with cancer or graduated from college.”

—Los Angeles Times, 10/10/2004

China's hunger for the world's raw materials is beginning to cause alarm. Not only is it pushing world prices for key commodities higher but is also using its foreign exchange to buy into foreign resource companies, much to the consternation of overseas nationals. China's growing demand for raw materials has led to a surge in the prices of metals [in 2004]. Rising Chinese demand has also led to shortages, globally, of both copper and nickel. Chinese demand has driven iron ore and coking coal prices to record highs, robbing Japanese steel firms—once the world's largest commodity buyers—of the ability to set prices. As China has become the world's largest importer of iron ore, the Japanese now have to compete for supplies.

—Global Info.org, 10/29/2004

The US current account deficit ballooned to a record \$166 billion in the second quarter, underlining the mounting imbalances in the global economy. The deficit was unprecedented both in dollar terms and relative to the size of the economy, reaching 5.7 per cent of national income. Economists said it raised the risk of a further slide in the dollar but that there were no signs so far that the US was struggling to attract foreign capital to finance the gap. "This is an accident waiting to happen," said Nigel Gault, director of US research at Global Insight. "But the accident might not necessarily happen any time soon." The US has been helped in funding the deficit by Asian central banks, which have been buying dollars to prevent appreciation of their currencies from damaging exports.

—Financial Times, 9/15/2004

U.S. Airways Group threatens to freeze or terminate pension plans. UAL stops putting money into its pension plans. The city of San Diego, struggling to meet generous pension promises, closes swimming pools and libraries to save money. Congress ponders how much to make the elderly pay for rising Medicare costs and how much to make younger taxpaying workers pick up. The next couple of decades will bring more headlines like these. The cost of pension and health-care promises that the U.S. and other countries have made to retirees is becoming painfully evident. We're just beginning to see tension between younger workers and older retirees over how big a slice of the pie each group will get.

—Wall Street Journal, 9/16/2004

DeGolyer & Macnaughton, the respected Dallas company that audits oil reserve totals for most of the Russian oil industry, said that West Siberia alone could hold twice as much recoverable crude as currently estimated. That's enough to allow Russia to produce 10 million barrels a day for the next 50 years and beyond. Russia is the only country where such huge reserves are available to foreign investors. This discovery makes Russia the world's largest oil producer outside the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and makes a major contribution toward Moscow's heightened international clout.

—Wall Street Journal, 9/30/2004

## Israel

There has been an 84 percent decrease in the number of Israelis killed in terror attacks since the completion of the first portion of the security fence, which comprises 134 kilometers [83 miles] between Salem and Elkana. A Shin Bet (Israeli internal security organization) report released on September 27, which summed up the first four years since the outbreak of violence in September 2000, revealed that since the fence's completion, terrorist organizations operating in Samaria succeeded in perpetrating six suicide bomb attacks inside Israel in which 30 Israelis were killed; 73 suicide bomb attacks killed 293 Israelis since the outbreak of violence in September 2000. A total of 1,017 Israelis and foreigners have been killed in terror attacks in the past four years.

—Jerusalem Post, 9/28/2004

The European Union (EU) is heading for a row over ties with Israel as it attempts to introduce a major new policy designed to bring the bloc closer to its neighbors, EU diplomats said. The dispute hinges on whether the EU should extend highly advantageous economic and political ties to Israel while at the same time condemning the Jewish state for [alleged] disproportionate use of force against Palestinians in Gaza. The EU is a member of a “Quartet”—with the United States, the United Nations, and Russia—promoting peace in the Middle East.

—Reuters, 10/7/2004

The first three quarters of 2004 have seen almost a 50 percent Israeli increase in trade with Arab countries. Despite the Oslo War, Israel's economic relations with Arab states seem to be warming up. Israel's trade with Arab states rose a total of 47.4% so far in 2004 to US\$169.7 million, according to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics. In September the Arab League's Israel Boycott Bureau called upon the European Union to suspend preferred trade relations with Israel and to enforce a EU boycott of Israeli products from Judea, Samaria, and Gaza.

—Arutz 7, 9/21/2004

U.S. President George Bush is expected to call on Europe to assume a key role in helping the new Palestinian leadership [following the death of Yassar Arafat] build and support institutions and prepare for negotiations with Israel. Such a call would represent a notable increase in cooperation between Washington and its European allies over the Middle East. According to many officials and diplomats, the administration favors a change in the American approach of backing Mr. Sharon's settlement expansions and his hard line in the West Bank. In recent months, Bush has given Mr. Sharon leeway to proceed with West Bank settlement. Lately, however, European, Arab and Palestinian leaders have begun expressing disdain for the Gaza plan, claiming Israel wants to totally undermine Palestinian communities.

—New York Times, 11/12/2004



The Israeli Plants Production and Marketing Board is optimistic about citrus exports this winter season. It predicts a 36 percent growth in exports, by volume, to 188,000 tons, and a 40 percent increase in value, to US\$162 million. Israel expects a bumper citrus crop of 600,000 tons, a third more than last year. The citrus crop in other Mediterranean countries is expected to increase by only 3 percent.

—Globes Report, 10/14/2004

## **Book Review**

**Running on Empty**, Peter G. Peterson. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2004. 239 pages.

In the 1916 forward to *The Battle of Armageddon*, Pastor C. T. Russell suggested that the bankruptcy of nations would lead to anarchy and the final throes of Armageddon. Although his vision of this as the natural outcome of debts incurred in the first world war did not come to pass, it need not mean the expectation was wrong. Peterson details a future course of deficit spending created by war, budget and trade deficits, and social promises that lead down the same path.

Growing deficits combined with net household consumption (consumer savings less consumer purchases) are causing a scenario that could lead to global disaster. Peterson presents evidence that even today savings as a percent of Gross Domestic Product has declined to the same level as it was just prior to the Great Depression.

The most troubling aspect of his analysis is the future burden that will be placed on America by the liability accumulating in social and welfare programs. In March 2004, the Social Security and Medicare trustees estimated the unfunded benefit liabilities of current programs to be \$74 trillion. This does not show up in any government accounting because of the use of cash accounting (pay as you go) rather than accrual accounting as is required by corporations. While politicians like to discuss surpluses during certain administrations, Peterson shows how this is nothing but political rhetoric. Peterson shows no bias in his views, but cites the promises and legislation of all political parties in adding to the problem.

The war on terrorism adds another troubling scenario. Today's high tech wars such as that being waged in Iraq are estimated to cost \$1 billion per week.

Although most doomsday authors make predictions that never come to pass, Peterson's thought-provoking analysis is based on liabilities that already exist. He is an economist and member of the highly respected Blackstone Group. His book ends with a call to change direction. Most Bible Students will see that any such changes are not likely because one cannot reverse the hearts of men during the current age. Among the solutions offered are mandated savings, Medicare reform which eliminates new drug research

aimed at prolonging life, the elimination of life-sustaining and neo-natal benefits, and the radical overhauling of the current two-party system in the U.S.

*Running on Empty* offers a stark view of why the current course of the United States and other nations cannot continue without a day of reckoning. That day of reckoning will likely be the precedent to the final stages of Armageddon—perhaps within the next thirty years.

—Len Griebhs

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