

## ***The Gospel of Matthew***

Matthew 21:5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King...

Each of the four gospel writers describes Jesus from completely different perspectives. Mark sees Jesus as the perfect servant of God, one who acts quickly and has little to say. Luke presents Jesus as a perfect man with love toward all, especially the despised classes of humanity. John describes Jesus as the Son of God, as God's personal representative on earth.

Today we are going to focus on Matthew's gospel. From the very beginning, it appears that this book was a great favorite among the early Christians. There certainly are a great many texts that we all love in this book. It has been termed "first among equals" when comparing it to the other gospels.

Having Matthew as the first book of the New Testament is appropriate. He is the logical "bridge" between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Even though he wrote for a Jewish audience, we will see that he does not tell the Jews what they want to hear. The original text of Matthew is in Greek, but many authorities believe it was originally written in Aramaic and circulated among the Jews in that form.

Matthew presents Jesus as the King of Israel. He is truly the long-awaited Messiah. It is Matthew's gospel that provides the narrative illustrating the kingly nature of the "branch."

### **The Branch**

The word "branch" or "sprout" is used in the scriptures to show vitality, prosperity, or descendants.

Consider these words:

Isa. 11:1,2 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him...

David was the descendant of Jesse and was revered by the Jews. But as time passed, David's royal house dried up. It was like the stump of an almost dead tree. These words in Isaiah prophesied that out of the "root" would come a branch, and this "branch" would be glorious. Among other things, he would "slay the wicked" [vs. 4], which to the Jews meant Israel's enemies.

It is interesting to trace the use of the title "branch" in scripture. There are four prophecies that characterize this "branch" from four different perspectives. Each seems to be descriptive of one particular gospel. Let's look at the one corresponding to Matthew.

Jer. 23:5 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous **Branch**, and a **King** shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

The context shows that the word "branch" is a title, the name of someone to come. This "someone" is a king. When Matthew writes his gospel, his objective is to show that the lawful heir to David's throne has arrived. This is the one who should be accepted as King. The next "Branch" scripture is descriptive of Mark's gospel.

Zech. 3:8 For behold, I will bring forth my **Servant**, the **Branch**.

This illustrates the presentation we find in Mark's gospel where Jesus is shown to be the perfect servant of God.

Zech 6:12 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.

Luke's gospel shows Jesus as the perfect man. Luke describes the perfect humanity of our Lord and emphasizes his love for all mankind, especially the despised elements of Jewish society.

Isa. 4:2 In that day shall the **branch** of the Lord be beautiful and glorious.[40:9] O Zion...O Jerusalem...lift up thy voice with strength...say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

This is the foundation of John's gospel where Jesus is shown as God's personal representative on earth. It is not "Behold the man" in John's gospel. It is "Behold your God."

We have been referring to the four "gospels." The Greek word *evangelion*, translated *gospel*, means "good news" or "glad tidings." But the English word *gospel* started out as *God's spel* ["spel" is Old English for

“word” or “discourse”). Thus the first four books of the New Testament represent “God’s Word” for us as communicated by his only begotten son. That’s why these four books are so important to Christians everywhere.

### **Jesus as King**

Put yourself in the place of Matthew. You are going to write your gospel to prove to your people that Jesus was the Messiah, the long-promised king of Israel. How are you going to do it? How can you make a convincing case? Answer: the same way you try to convince anyone today that your point of view is correct. You quote scripture.

Matthew quotes 54 scriptures from the Old Testament, more than twice the number of the other gospel writers. Of those he quotes, 22 are unique to him. Let’s look at a few of the unique ones [your margin will tell you where they are in the Old Testament]:

Matt. 1:22,23 Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet [Isaiah], saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.

Matt. 2:5,6 Thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem . . . out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel.

Matt. 2:15 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

Matt. 8:17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses.

Matt. 13:35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying, I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things which have been kept secret.

Matt. 21:4,5 All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold thy king cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass.

Matt. 27:9 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, And they took the 30 pieces of silver...

Matt. 27:35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

There are a great many more scriptures like these, of course. Notice the constant repetition of the phrase “that it might be fulfilled.” This is the way Matthew builds the evidence that Jesus Christ is the one the scriptures predicted. There is one text that is a bit troubling:

Matt. 2:23 And he 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.

Where can you find it written in any prophet that “he shall be called a Nazarene”? Your margin will be of no help. One authority says the name Nazareth means “branch town” and thus Matthew is here making reference to the Branch in Isa. 11:1 which we have already considered. But the Companion Bible will have none of that. It says that it was “spoken by the prophets” [plural] and that only Isaiah uses it directly as a prophecy of Jesus. It prefers to say that it Matthew says it was “spoken,” not “written,” so why make a problem for yourself where none exists. Don’t try to find it in written words.

But assuming that Nazareth does mean “branch town,” we have so many scriptures that prophesy of a coming “branch” (and from what better place should he come than “branch town”?) that I’m perfectly happy to accept that our various branch scriptures, and particularly Isa. 11:1 were what Matthew had in mind.

On six occasions Matthew quotes Jesus as reminding his audience that they surely must have read something in their sacred scriptures. He does this more than the other gospel writers combined, probably because his audience is pre-disposed to believe what’s written in their Bible. Here’s one occasion:

Matt. 19:4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female?

Without analyzing why Jesus was saying this, we want to emphasize that in this text Jesus was not an evolutionist. He believed our first parents were created. Those who believe that human beings came into existence through a process of evolution do not.

### **Jesus Christ**

Look at how Matthew opens his gospel:

Matt. 1:1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

The word *Messiah* in the New Testament is simply a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew *Messiah*. In Hebrew the word means “anointed.” As a transliteration, the word *Messiah* is found only twice and only in John. The word *Christ* is a Greek translation of the same Hebrew word [*Messiah*]. There would be less confusion if the word were always written as *Messiah*. *Jesus* is equivalent to the Hebrew *Joshua* and means “the salvation of Jehovah.” Thus Matthew introduces his subject as Jesus the Messiah.

The word *anointed* is particularly appropriate. In Old Testament times when kings and priests were set apart for their office, they were anointed with oil. The oil used for the high priest was so special that no one could make it or put it on a stranger under penalty of death. (Ex. 30:32,33) “To anoint” means “to consecrate.”

Matthew next mentions “Son of David” even before he mentions Abraham. That’s because he wants his readers to see Jesus as the heir of David, the prophetic “Branch.” Jesus is the prophetic fulfillment of what God said through the prophet Nathan:

2 Sam. 7:12 And when thy days [David’s 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. [vs. 16] And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

Matthew traces his genealogy from Abraham to Joseph, Mary’s husband. But why do that? Why should anyone care about Joseph? Answer: it was a question of legality. Because Joseph was Mary’s husband, Jesus was legally considered his son. Jesus was thus legally a “son of David” as the Jews reckoned inheritance.

In this genealogy when Matthew comes to David, he adds the words “the king” [vs. 6]. These are important words because he shows Jesus as “the king,” the rightful descendent of David’s royal house. He uses the expression “son of David” as a title for Jesus in his very first verse and eight other times in his gospel. Here’s one, when Jesus was presented to the people as king:

Matt. 21:9 And the multitudes that went before and that followed cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest.

Matthew shows how the scriptures prophesied about Jesus by showing that the words spoken by the people were written in Psa. 118:25,26. The April ‘88 *Bible Review* contains an article on this text. The word *Hosanna* is a pure Hebrew word transliterated into Greek. Even though many translators think it is a cry of praise, the word has nothing to do with praise. It is a cry for help. Consider the psalm:

Psa. 118:25,26 Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

*Hosanna* is a pleading cry for help. It may be considered a one-word prayer. And the cry is that the “Son of David” and the “Most High” do the saving. So without going into all the details, let me simply read this text in a new way:

Matt. 21:9 [corrected version] Save, please, O Son of David. Blessed in the name of the Lord is he who comes. Save, please, O Most High.

## The Sermon on the Mount

There are five great discourses by our Lord in the book of Matthew. [5:1 to 7:29; 9:35 to 11:1; 13:1-58; 18:1 to 19:1; 24:1 to 26:2] The longest is in chapters five, six, and seven and is called “The Sermon on the Mount.” Some of it is contained in Luke, but about 70% is unique to Matthew. Some think Matthew collected the sayings of Jesus given at different times and made it appear as though he said it all at one sitting. Whether or not that is true is really of no concern to us. What interests Bible Students is what Jesus said.

The sermon begins with the Beatitudes. Even though they occupy just ten verses, some think that was all there was in the Sermon on the Mount. Nine times our Lord begins by saying “Blessed.” Strong says the Greek word means “supremely blessed, by extension, fortunate: it is translated blessed, happy.” Think about the word *happy*. What image comes to your mind when you think about someone who is happy? Perhaps a craftsman at his work, a mother with her baby, a Christian in his meditation? What probably does not come to your mind is what the world thinks brings happiness: riches, honor, splendor, or sensual pleasures.

People think the beatitudes are passive and mild because they commend those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, are meek, merciful, peacemakers. But who would you prefer to be with: those with these characteristics or those of an opposite temper—the ones who are proud, the light-hearted bent on pleasure, the aggressors, those who are never criticized because they always “play it safe,” and those who persecute others? The beatitudes are not “weak” at all. They are far superior to the teachings of men. Happiness, you see, comes from within. It is a by-product of a way of life and of worship. Christ fulfilled all of them in his life and we should try to do the same if we claim to be walking in his footsteps.

Luke also records these beatitudes. But the next 30 verses in Matthew chapter 5 are not found elsewhere. Jesus talks about the moral life of the Christian community and specifically says that the righteousness of Christians must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. Because he writes for a Jewish audience, Matthew includes these words:

Matt. 5:17 Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy but to fulfil.

The Jews were born and raised to believe that their law was the basis of their unique relationship to God. Even though they were impressed with the miracles of our Lord, they were concerned about what this meant to their law in the long run. Here Jesus tells them that he is there to give that law a new meaning, one that God had always intended it have. As we know, most of them simply could not accept this. Their strong commitment to their law would cause most of them to stumble:

Rom. 9:31,32 But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone.

Thus we see how something good can be the enemy of something better. The law was good, but it was not good enough to provide justification, to make them right with God. The something better was there, but most of them couldn't accept it.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks about what will happen to those who are angry at their brethren, offenses caused by a “right eye” or “right hand,” he expands the application of various Old Testament laws to Christians, he gives the Lord's prayer, talks about laying up treasure in heaven, the good things the Father will give us, the golden rule, the narrow way, and how we must DO his commandments, not just HEAR them. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount we read:

Matt. 7:28,29 And it came to pass, when Jesus ended these words, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Adam Clarke says: “So ends a sermon, the most strict, pure, holy, profound, and sublime as ever delivered to man; yet so amazingly simple is the whole that almost a child may understand it.”

## **The Gentiles**

We would not expect Matthew to say anything about the Gentiles since he writes for a Jewish audience. But he does not tell them what they want to hear. Like the other gospel writers, Matthew shows that the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind. His book contains strong warnings against a blind trust that a descent from Abraham means automatic acceptance with God:

Matt. 2:1 When Jesus was born in Bethlehem...behold there came wise men from the east.

Matthew describes the revealing of Jesus as the King of the Jews first to non-Jews "from the east," who [in vs. 12] "departed into their own country another way." Nothing is said about this knowledge going to the Jews.

Matt. 8:11 And 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.

Matt. 11:28 Come unto me, ALL ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

These two scriptures could be interpreted to mean only those of the Jewish community. But there is no chance of that interpretation at the very end of this gospel:

Matt. 28:19 [penultimate vs. of Matt.] Go ye therefore and teach ALL nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy spirit.

## **Conclusion**

The gospel of Matthew has been one of the best loved books of the New Testament from the very start of the Christian experience. In it Jesus is portrayed as a king, the long-awaited Messiah of his people. Matthew proves his thesis by constantly quoting from the Old Testament, much more than the other three gospel writers.

Jesus was the fulfillment of the law. In the Sermon on the Mount he gave his followers a new law, one that transcended the letter of the old law and embodied the spirit of the Gospel Age. He taught that by faith anyone could enter into a relationship with the Heavenly Father by believing on him. This was more than most Jews could do.

There is, perhaps, no greater contrast between human philosophies and the teachings of Christ than we have in:

Matt. 11:28-30 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.

Those who have accepted this gracious invitation will say in their hearts, Amen.

## ***The Gospel of Mark***

Isa. 42:1 [NIV] Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

Each of the four gospel writers describes Jesus from quite different perspectives. Matthew writes for a Jewish audience and presents Jesus as King, their Messiah. Luke presents Jesus as a perfect man, one who loves even the despised classes of humanity. John describes Jesus as the Son of God, God's personal representative on earth.

Today we're going to consider Mark's gospel. Our Isaiah text sets the tone for Mark's presentation of Jesus: "Here is my servant." His gospel is considered the best for young people because it is the shortest and is a book of action. Things are happening all the time. He records few discourses and only four parables. There are four "branch" scriptures in the Old Testament that characterized Jesus in four different ways. Here's the one that describes Mark:

Zech. 3:8 For behold, I will bring forth my **Servant**, the **Branch**.

Scholars like to debate whether one gospel writer copied from another and if so, who wrote first. Some say Mark's gospel was first. But such discussions don't interest us. God gave four perspectives of the ministry of His son for good reason. How many views of a building would you want to see before judging it? Certainly more than one. The four gospels are like four views of the same thing. They have similarities, but they also have differences. The result is a word-picture of Jesus that is life-like and three dimensional.

### **Who was Mark?**

Mark was not an apostle. There is a single Greek word that is translated five times *Mark* and three times *Marcus* in New Testament. It is the name of the same person who, we believe, was the author of the Gospel of Mark. From these eight instances we learn several things.

In addition to the Roman name Mark, he also had the name of John, a Jewish name (Acts 12:25). This was not unusual. Paul is a Roman name, Saul is a Jewish name (Acts 13:9).

Peter was thrown into a Jerusalem prison by Herod and was miraculously released by an angel. Then he went immediately to the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, where a prayer meeting was taking place. (Acts 12:12) This implies that Mary and Mark were early believers in the Gospel. Peter was so impressed with Mark that he called him his "son" (1 Pet. 5:13). This does not mean he was Mark's father by blood, but that he may have been instrumental in bringing him to the Lord through his personal ministry.

Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey but left them before the trip was over (Acts 13:13). Later Paul and Barnabas had a "sharp contention" about taking Mark with them a second time (Acts 15:39). Paul was angry because Mark previously left them. Because they could not agree, they separated over this issue: Barnabas went one direction with Mark, Paul went another with Silas.

Barnabas was related to Mark. Col. 4:10 says Mark was "sister's son to Barnabas." The *Diaglott* says Mark was "nephew to Barnabas." But the *Companion Bible* and most translations say he was cousin to Barnabas. Because they were kinsmen, Barnabas might have taken a more charitable view of Mark. Paul later changed his mind and said Mark was a great help to him (2 Tim. 4:11).

So Mark was someone who had an early knowledge of the truth. Although not an apostle, he may have heard Jesus speak at Jerusalem. His mother was an early Christian. It was probably through the ministry of Peter that the family came into the truth. Some say much of what Mark describes in his gospel probably came from Peter. Certainly Peter would have a great influence on Mark's mind because he could speak from first-hand knowledge. But Mark would also have contact with many others who had first-hand knowledge and who attended the meetings in his mother's house.

### **The Gospel Itself**

Mark wrote for a Gentile audience. Because genealogies would be of no interest to them, he includes none. Old Testament references are generally what Jesus himself quoted or others quoted when speaking to him. Since he assumes his audience does not know Aramaic words, he often defines them:

Mark 7:11 If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is *Corban*, that is to say, a *gift*. . .

Mark 15:34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*, which is, being interpreted, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

In contrast to Matthew who shows Jesus at the highest earthly position [king], Mark shows him at the lowest [servant]. Jesus is, of course, the perfect servant and is the model we must copy. There are no preliminaries in this gospel. Jesus as servant goes about his ministry quickly. In fact, that's a word he uses frequently:

Mark 1:10 And straightway coming up out of the water he saw the heavens opened . . . [vs. 12] And immediately the spirit driveth him into the wilderness.

In Greek Mark uses *straightway* and *immediately* 26 times in connection with Jesus and his acts—that's three times more often than the other gospel writers combined.

Because Mark describes a man of action, his account is the most complete concerning the miracles of Jesus. There are a total of 27 miracles performed by Jesus described in the four gospels. Mark records two thirds of them, six of which are found only in his gospel. One such unique miracle concerns the healing of deafness coupled with a speech impediment:

Mark 7:32-35 [NIV] Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (*an Aramaic word*) which means, "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak plainly.

There's one important word the other gospel writers use 73 times that Mark avoids completely. That's the title *Lord*. The word does occur twice: once a Gentile woman calls Jesus Lord (7:28) and once the word appears in the King James but not in the oldest Greek manuscripts (9:24). Because Mark shows Jesus in the special role of servant, it would be inappropriate to show him being addressed as "Lord" by any Jew during his earthly ministry.

### **Unique Passages**

Much of what Mark describes can be found in the other gospels. He records only four parables, one of which is unique.

Mark 4:26-29 [NIV] This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it because the harvest has come.

In the parable of the sower, the kind of soil determines what happens to the seed. But here the mysterious power of the seed itself is stressed. By this parable Jesus was emphasizing that the gospel message itself [the seed] contained its own power to grow and produce fruit and would eventually result in a time of harvest.

Most Bible Students have marked the last 12 verses of the book as spurious. These are so marked on the authority of Prof. Tischendorf. In the sixth volume (p. 637) Bro. Russell said they were added around the fifth century. But were they?

It's true that these versions are missing from the oldest Greek manuscripts. But the Syriac version dates from 170 A.D. and is older than any of Greek manuscript. It contains the verses. There are Latin and Gothic versions older than any Greek manuscripts and they contain the verses. Why are these verses so controversial?

Most of these verses presents no particular problem. But look at verse 17:

Mark 16:17,18 And these signs shall follow them that believed: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Unfortunately there are those who read these verses and think that if they are true believers, they can claim this promise. So they attempt to speak in tongues, heal the sick, and some even go so far as handle poisonous snakes. But this is NOT authorized by this verse at all. This verse describes what would happen during the establishment of the church not what would happen to believers throughout the Gospel Age.

Heb. 2:3,4 [It] first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his own will.

The “them” that heard him were the apostles. They preached what they heard, and their testimony was confirmed by miracles. They spoke with tongues on the day of Pentecost. Paul was not hurt by the bite of a viper [Acts 28:3]. Peter, John, Paul and others were constantly healing the sick. According to what we know not one apostle died because of poisonous drink. The words in these two verses are very similar to words recorded in Luke:

Luke 10:17 And the seventy returned again with joy saying, Lord even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. [verse 19] Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions . . . and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

Maybe the last twelve verses of Mark are spurious. But they are not embarrassing to us if they are genuine. These verses describe the witness of the spirit that would accompany the message of the apostles. It does not describe our experiences.

### **Son of Man vs. Son of God**

Whose son was Jesus? There are many correct answers to this question. In Mark 6:3 when Jesus preaches to his neighbors in the synagogue, they are astonished and say, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary.” In Mark 10:47 a blind beggar hearing that Jesus is passing by, cries out, “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” In the very first verse of his gospel, Mark says, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

But none of these is the one that is most used. It is, “Son of Man,” a title first used by Jesus of himself in chapter 2:

Mark 2:10 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins... [he then says to the one sick of palsy...]

The phrase “Son of God” appears only four times in Mark; “Son of Man” occurs 14 times. Matthew and Luke also use these two expressions in about the same proportion; John uses each about the same number of times.\* The phrase “Son of Man” occurs 84 times in the four gospels. Sometimes Jesus almost insists on the title:

Mark 14:61,62 Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed [*“Son of God” in Matt. 26:63*]? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Why does Jesus use this title so much? Do you think of him as the “son of man”—or as the “son of God”? To understand this, let us first look at the title “son of David.”

Matt. 1:1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

Matthew uses the title “Son of David” nine times in his gospel and emphasizes it by mentioning it immediately. Why? Because he wants his readers to see Jesus as the heir of David, the prophetic fulfillment of a prophecy God gave to David through Nathan the prophet:

2 Sam. 7:12 And when thy days [David’s 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. [vs. 16] And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

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\*Matthew--"of God" 9 times, "of Man" 32 times; Mark--"of God" 4 times, "of Man" 14 times; Luke--"of God" 6 times, "of Man" 26 times; John--"of God" and "of Man" 12 times each.

Matthew's gospel shows Jesus as a king, the rightful descendent of David's royal house. Thus by saying "son of David" Matthew is essentially saying "inheritor of what was David's." David had a dominion. The Jews were living under Roman occupation and certainly knew that dominion had been lost. But they looked for David's heir who would re-establish that dominion.

When God created the first man, he gave him a dominion.

Gen. 1:28 And God said . . . have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Psa. 8:4-6 What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.

Because of disobedience, Adam lost this dominion. Who could claim it, who would be his inheritor? It would be the "son of Adam"—"son of man." In Hebrews chapter 2 the apostle quotes this 8th Psalm and continues:

Heb. 2:8,9 Thou hast put all thing in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Jesus as the son of God is the "heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2). As the son of Man he is the heir to the dominion of earth originally entrusted to the first man and forfeited by him. He is the great kinsman of mankind who possesses the ransoming power to redeem them from sin and death. His miracles manifested his divine origins. Yet Jesus stresses his kinship with humanity. When asked if he is the "son of God," Jesus by his answer shows the high priest that what he associates with the "son of God" actually belongs to the "son of man." He echoes the prophetic words of Daniel:

Dan. 7:13 I saw in the night visions and behold one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of days.

In John 1:14 we read, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." He did not materialize in a human body as angels had done before him. He was actually flesh because of his human mother yet perfect because his father was God. This way he could inherit Adam's dominion without inheriting the condemnation that passed upon Adam's posterity.

John stresses the importance of acknowledging that Jesus was truly human:

1 John 4:2,3 Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.

It is amazing that in spite of such clear statements, so many Christians continue to insist that Jesus was really divine because he was part of God and the Holy Spirit in a great mystery called the trinity. He was not divine. He was flesh, human, the son of man. Even though he is now divine, he still retains this title and the dominion to which he is entitled:

Acts 7:56 [Stephen speaks] Behold I see the heavens opened and the son of man standing on the right hand of God.

## **Conclusion**

The gospel of Mark is one of four views of Jesus and his ministry. It is in this presentation that we see Jesus as the perfect servant of God. We likewise should consider his life a model for our own. Let us, as he did, do all our tasks quickly and without hesitation.

Although the holy spirit bore witness with signs and wonders which accompanied the preaching of the gospel by the apostles, it has not done so since that time. The last 12 verses of Mark should not be seen as descriptive of the church's experience today.

We considered the title “son of man” and learned that it refers to Jesus as the inheritor of Adam, one who is worthy to inherit the dominion lost by the first man. In like manner he is the “son of David” and inherits the throne and dominion of his Father David. But to us, his footstep followers, he is the “son of God.” If faithful, we will be with him in heaven as members of his body and joint-heirs in the “all things” that have become his.

May the example given to us in this gospel energize us to greater faithfulness and zeal in the service of our heavenly Father.

## ***The Gospel of Luke***

1 Cor. 15:47 The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven.

Suppose you were a newspaper reporter asking people to list the characteristics of a perfect man. What do you suppose they would say? Their answers would probably sound something like this:

Height: six feet	Weight: 160 pounds
Hair: dark	Eyes: blue
Rich	Single

Now suppose we produced such a man with all of these characteristics. Furthermore we found that the man was so terribly self-centered that he could talk only about himself and had absolutely no interest in anyone else. Clearly such a man would be far from perfect!

### **Luke's Portrait**

Each of the four gospel writers describe Jesus from completely different perspectives. Matthew describes him as the King of Israel, the Messiah. He mentions the wise men and their expensive gifts (but says nothing about shepherds). Mark sees Jesus as the perfect servant of God, one who acts quickly and has little to say. John describes Jesus as the Son of God, God's personal representative on earth. His is a theological account, not a biological one, and consists mostly of the words Jesus spoke.

But Luke presents Jesus as a perfect man. His is the most comprehensive account comprising a prologue, a growing up period, and including the ascension. He traces his genealogy back to Adam, the first perfect man. In contrast to what people today might think important in a perfect man, Luke does NOT tell us Jesus' height, weight, or the color of his hair and eyes. Money? This perfect man and his family don't have any:

Luke 2:24 [at the circumcision of Jesus Mary offered] a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

In fact the law said she was to bring a lamb and a turtledove. She could bring two turtledoves only if she was too poor to bring a lamb. [see Lev. 12:8]

Luke's portrait of Jesus as a perfect man emphasizes his relationships with others including his heavenly father. We should study this portrait to see what we can learn from it, to see how we can bring our own lives into conformity with this image. It was Paul who wrote:

Rom 8:29 Whom he did foreknow [and that includes you and me] he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.

### **Relationships with Others**

In Luke's portrait Jesus is sympathetic to the poor, the despised, children, women, and even the hated Samaritans. On occasion he does associate with the rich, the powerful, and those of high social status, but he finds few that interest him. We have an interesting insight into why this was the case:

Luke 7:36 [NIV] Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. [When Simon, his host, criticizes Jesus in his heart for permitting this to happen, Jesus gives a parable:] [vs. 41] "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," [vs 47] Therefore I tell you that her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he loves little who has been forgiven little.

2000 years ago women were almost non-persons. They were rarely educated and had virtually no rights. Then as now those who became prostitutes were labelled sinners. (But of course nothing was said about the men who were their patrons.) At that time the leaders spent their time with other men. Jesus did no such thing. He was as comfortable with women as with men:

Luke 10:38,39 [NIV] As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

He was also comfortable with publicans:

Luke 5:29 And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But the scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

From McClintock and Strong [vol. VIII, p. 769]: "The publicans were hated as the instruments by which the subjection of the Jews to the Roman emperor was perpetuated. They were noted for their extortion and were tempted to oppress the people with illegal exactions so that they might the more speedily enrich themselves. The publicans were regarded as traitors and apostates, defiled by their frequent intercourse with the heathen, and willing tools of the oppressor. They were classed with sinners, with harlots, and with the heathen. The scribes and the people alike hated them." Jesus did not!

Even worse than publicans were the Samaritans. McClintock & Strong [vol. IX, p. 286]: "The Jews would have no dealings with the Samaritans that they could possibly avoid. 'Thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil' was the mode in which the Jews expressed themselves when at a loss for a bitter reproach. The Samaritan was publicly cursed in their synagogues; could not be adduced as a witness in the Jewish courts; could not be admitted to any sort of proselytism; and was thus, so far as the Jew could affect his position, excluded from hope of eternal life."

Jesus refused to accept the ordinary prejudices of those around him. Far from avoiding Samaritans, Jesus praises them. In Luke 10:33 he gives that most loved parable of the Good Samaritan. In Luke 17:16, after curing ten lepers, only one, a Samaritan, returns to give thanks.

The easiest way to live is as those around us are living. But that's not the way a perfect man behaves. We see from Luke's portrait that Jesus considered all human beings to be valuable and worth his time and his attention. He indulged none of the common prejudices of his day. He willingly spent time with women, children, tax collectors, prostitutes, and even non-Jews like the Samaritans.

So how are you and I living today? Do we share the prejudices of those around us? Do we think our time is best spent with others just like ourselves? Or are we willing to follow the example of our Master and witness to the poor, to children, women, and even those who are openly sinful or might be considered unacceptable to the leaders of society? Remember: God has predestinated that we should be conformed to the image of His son.

### **Relationship to God**

If we didn't know better, we might think a perfect man would have no need for outside support. We would assume he would have inexhaustible energy and could tap his own source of inner strength at any time. But that's NOT Luke's portrait of Jesus. From Jordan to the cross, Luke shows Jesus in prayer on many occasions not mentioned by anyone else:

Luke 3:21 Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened.

The baptism of Jesus is described by others, but the fact that he was praying is mentioned only by Luke. So at the start of his walk as a New Creature, we find him praying to his heavenly father.

Luke 5:15,16 But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed.

Time passes and Jesus has great success. But he does not take the credit for himself. He knows that the credit belongs to his father and so he continues to approach Him in prayer.

Luke 6:12,13 He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.

Selecting the 12 was a big decision. He did not presume to make that decision without guidance from his Father. So he spent the entire night in prayer. Then the next day he took action.

Luke 9:18 [after the preaching and healing success of the 12] And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him.

Now the success is of others, not himself. And again he comes to his heavenly Father in prayer, we presume in thankfulness that their ministry has been blessed.

Luke 9:29 And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening.

Matthew and Mark both mention the transfiguration scene, but neither say anything about his praying. Here as his three special disciples receive a special vision of the kingdom in glory, he is once again seen praying.

Luke 11:1 And it came to pass that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray.

His disciples were aware of his constant communication with his father. They knew Jesus had a relationship with God that they did not have. So they asked to be taught how to pray.

Luke 22:41,42 And he was withdrawn from [his disciples] about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

Here at the close of his earthly ministry, Jesus again comes to the Father in prayer. It is clear that he drew his strength not from within himself, but from his Father. If he or others had success, he prayed about it. If he had a big decision to make, he prayed about it. At his baptism and at the cross, he prayed for insight and guidance. By his example we see how prayer is the foundation of our relationship to God.

## **Wealth**

Luke believes there is no better test of a man than to look at how he uses his money. We have already observed the poverty of Mary and Joseph. Jesus himself, who was once rich beyond imagining, became poor. [2 Cor. 8:9] Luke is the only one who records a parable that contrasts false riches with the true:

Luke 12:16-21 [NIV] And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores things up for himself but is not rich toward God."

Clearly this rich man did not understand the difference between earthly riches and true riches. A few verses later Jesus speaks to his followers and builds on the lesson of this parable:

Luke 12:32-34 [NIV] Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Where is your treasure? You will know by looking at where your heart is. It could be your business, your investments, your career, your home, or any of a variety of places where "moth destroys and thieves come near." These words seem to imply that to the degree that we are interested in treasure on earth, to that degree we will have no treasure in heaven.

We commented earlier about Jesus' relationship with Samaritans. In the well-known parable, the Good Samaritan with no hesitation gives of his time and his money to help another person, one he does not know and one who is probably not of his nationality. In Luke's recounting of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, we see the insensitivity of a rich man who will not do anything to help someone in great need who has been "laid at his gate." [Luke 16:20]

Those with much of this world's goods have a problem. Will they love earthly things so much that they lose an opportunity for spiritual things, or will they willingly sacrifice what they have in the interest of others? No matter what any of us sacrifice it can't compare to what Jesus sacrificed when he gave up what he had in heaven and came to earth to die for us:

Phil. 2:3-8 **[Diaglott]** Do nothing from party-spirit, or vain-glory; but in humility esteeming others as excelling yourselves; not each one regarding his own interests, but each one also those of others. Let this disposition be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, though being in God's form, yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God, but divested himself, taking a bondman's form, having been made in the likeness of men; and being in condition as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

## Conclusion

The lasting image of Luke's portrait of a perfect man is God's love for all. The purpose of Jesus' ministry was summarized in:

Luke 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Luke compiled his account as an historian through interviews with those who were eye witnesses of the events. Throughout his account he emphasizes those events that prove God's love is not limited to the Jews. He quotes Simeon [2:32] that Jesus will be "a light to lighten the Gentiles." He quotes Jesus giving examples of God's favor to non-Jews [4:25-27—a Sidonian widow and Naaman the Syrian]. He quotes Jesus as commending the faith of a non-Jew as exceeding any faith found in Israel [7:9] And just before the ascension, he quotes Jesus as saying:

Luke 24:47 Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name **AMONG ALL NATIONS**, beginning at Jerusalem.

Why does Luke emphasize these points and the other gospel writers do not? Because unlike the others he is a Gentile, an outsider despised by the Jews. He's a convert to Christianity, one who accompanies Paul in bringing the gospel to other Gentiles. [Proof: Col. 4:10-14 says Aristarchus, Marcus, and Justus are "of the circumcision." Epaphras, Luke, and Demas are not in this category, are not of the circumcision, are not Jews.]

Like Luke, you and I are here because someone has been faithful to the commission to preach the name of Jesus among all nations. Let us draw lessons from Luke's portrait of a perfect man that apply to our own lives. Since we are to be conformed to the image of our Master, let us:

1. Not draw arbitrary distinctions among ourselves and others based on age, sex, wealth, or social standing.

James 2:5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him.

2. Recognize the importance of prayer in our relationship with our heavenly Father. Following the example of Jesus, we should come to the Father in prayer and thankfulness at all times, especially when he grants us success in his service, when he grants success to others, when we must make important decisions, and when we know we must endure some special trial.
3. Pay special attention to the way we use our money. The rich young ruler who wanted to inherit eternal life thought he had been reasonably successful following the commandments. But it was too hard to "sell all that he had and distribute it to the poor."

Luke 18:24 **[NIV]** Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" [vs. 28] Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

—END—

## ***The Gospel of John***

John 1:18 No man hath seen God at any time.

Even though John says no one has ever seen God, in fact many have seen Him. It was John himself who helped us see God. Of course we're not saying anyone has actually seen God with natural vision. God exists in a dimension far beyond what earthly minds comprehend. But we have seen God in a very real way:

John 14:8,9 Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.

Each of the four gospel writers describes Jesus from completely different perspectives. Matthew describes him as the King of Israel, the Messiah. He mentions the wise men and their expensive gifts (but says nothing about shepherds). Mark sees Jesus as the perfect servant of God, one who acts quickly and has little to say. Luke presents Jesus as a perfect man. His account has a prologue, a growing up period, and includes the ascension.

Each of these writers reveal the humanity of our Lord. John is different. He describes Jesus as the Son of God, God's personal representative on earth. His is a theological account, not a biological one, and consists mostly of the words Jesus spoke. In fact John is the only one who records the conversations Jesus had with Nicodemus [at night], the Samaritan woman at the well, and Pilate when the two of them were alone.

Each of the gospels can be described by a single L-word:

**Law:** Matthew shows how Jesus was the promised Messiah to the people of the law.

**Labor:** Mark shows Jesus as God's servant who does things quickly and says little.

**Love:** Luke emphasizes the love of Jesus for all mankind, particularly the poor, the disadvantaged, children, women, and even the hated Samaritans.

**Life:** John uses the word "life" many times more often than the others. Life is the whole point of his gospel:

John 20:31 But these [signs] are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

### **The Word**

John gives us no genealogy and starts at a time earlier than any of the others:

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word [Greek: *Logos*], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Of course John is describing Jesus. Verse 14 says, "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Why did he invent this new title, Logos? Because he wants to describe the role Jesus has in his gospel. Just as invisible thought is revealed by words, the invisible God is revealed by a living "Word." We use words to communicate our will; God used a *Logos* to do the same.

John 3:34 For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God.

Heb. 1:1,2 [NIV] In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.

Bible Students don't like the KJV of John 1:1 because it gives the impression that the Logos and God were exactly the same being which is what Trinitarians believe. Years ago I wrote the words "see Diaglott" next to this verse. Here's the Diaglott's word-for-word rendering:

John 1:1 [**Diaglott word-for-word**] In a beginning was the Word, and the Word was with the God, and a god was the Word.

I used to think that the Greek text always included the definite article “the” in front of *theos* when Jehovah is meant and that it did not have the article when a lesser deity is meant. I learned to my embarrassment that is just not true.

Some years ago I said what I believed about this scripture in a message sent to some who were discussing Bible subjects. Much to my surprise, some who knew more Greek than I did disputed this assertion:

John 1 [vs. 6] There was a man sent from God. [vs. 12] He gave power to become the sons of God. [vs. 18] No man hath seen God.

These are a few instances where the Greek definite article is **missing**. I was asked if I wanted to substitute the article “a” in front of God in these verses and write it with a little “g”? I did not. And there is also this scripture:

2 Cor. 4:4 In whome THE god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.

Here is an example where the definite article IS present, and it is not talking about Jehovah God. I now realize that the presence or absence of the article must have a local interpretation to the context. But since that experience, I realize that when we witness we might do a better job if we don't try to go into the details of the Greek language. Perhaps it might be better to first try to establish the relationship between God and the Logos in John's gospel. And what is that relationship? It is God the Father and Jesus His son. When we agree on that, we can then discuss what John 1:1 means.

John 16:28 I came forth from the Father and am come into the world: again, I leave the world and go to the Father.

Jesus is six times more likely to say “My Father” in John's gospel than in the other gospels. You will never find Jesus saying “Our Father” or “Your Father” in John. (These expressions occur 25 times in the other gospels.) John never says Jesus prayed to the Father, though Jesus does so frequently in the other gospels. (The word “pray” does occur in John, but it is a different Greek word with a different meaning.) There is no temptation scene, no baptism, no agony in the garden, and, surprisingly, no parables. (The word “parable” in 10:6 is a different Greek word, one translated *proverb* in the three other places it is used in John.)

John draws a portrait of God from Jesus' life on earth, a portrait that encompasses many themes.

### **Theme 1: Life**

We have already observed that life is the great theme of this book. John uses the word 39 times (it occurs only 17 times in the other gospels). The best known scripture from this gospel is in chapter three:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

This scripture emphasizes the Father-Son relationship, and that God's object in giving His son was to give life. This was not life just for Jews or those living at that time. It was “whosoever believeth” regardless of race, age, sex, national origin, or time period. The next verse says that this is so “the world might be saved.” John shows God as someone who is accessible to all.

Recently I heard an observation on this text I appreciated. Question: Why does God love the world when we are explicitly told not to love it in 1 John 2:15? Answer: We are not to love the world the way it is, and God doesn't love it in its present form either. He loves it because he sees the way it will be at the conclusion of his marvelous plan of salvation.

John is the only gospel writer who records the literal gift of life Jesus gave to one of his friends:

John 11:43,44 He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes.

Since John records no parables, it was left to Luke to record the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, a parable that was given a few weeks before Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead.

## Theme 2: Love

John is ten times more likely to use the word *love* than the other gospel writers. We have this word three times in a single verse:

John 13:34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

Notice that this is a new commandment. We are to love as Jesus loved. And just how did he love? Did he love his neighbor as himself? Certainly. In fact he loved his neighbor MORE than himself, because he laid down his life for his fellow man. In this verse he asks us to be ready on all occasions to lay down our lives for each other!

John never refers to himself in this gospel by name. Instead he speaks of himself as the recipient of the Master's love:

John 13:23 Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.

John returned that love with a single, undivided heart as we see in this gospel, his three letters, and the book of Revelation.

## Theme 3: Truth

John uses the words translated "truth, true, or truly" three times more often than the other gospel writers combined.

John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.

Once again John shows that Jesus is not the Father. He is the one who shows the way to the Father, he speaks the truth about the Father, and offers life to "whosoever believeth."

The word "verily" is like the word "truly." John always doubles this word:

John 6:47 Verily, verily I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

He does this on 25 occasions. The other writers never do it. Why? One suggestion is that it is to emphasize the greater authority with which our Lord speaks. He speaks for God and thus the words should be considered as having double importance.

John 17:17 Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.

John introduces Jesus as "the Word." That makes him an embodiment of the truth, one who is able to sanctify us, to set us apart for his service.

## Theme 4: Light

Light is another theme in this gospel. John wastes no time introducing the themes of light and life:

John 1:2-4 [Weymouth] All things came into being through him, and apart from him nothing that now exists came into being. In him was Life, and that Life was the Light of men. The Light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness has never overpowered it. [vs 9] There was the true Light, which lightens every man, coming into the world.

Once again John emphasizes the world-wide scope of the love of God: every person is to be enlightened. We say "to be" because Jesus has not yet enlightened every man. He has certainly not enlightened those who lived and died before he was born. Countless billions have died without hearing a word about the one through whom salvation is possible. This means there must be a future time of resurrection and instruction in righteousness to fulfill this scripture.

John is the only gospel writer who records a particular miracle where Jesus literally gave the gift of light to someone:

John 9:25 [The man born blind] answered and said . . . One thing I know, once I was blind, but now I can see.

## Theme 5: Water

John likes water. He uses the word four times more frequently than the others [they each average six times; he uses it 24 times]. Note these occasions, most of which are exclusive to John:

Turning water into wine at Cana (chapter 2).

Conversation with Nicodemus regarding being born of water (3:5).

Conversation with a Samaritan woman who came to draw water (chapter 4).

Healing the impotent man who could not enter a pool of “troubled” water (chapter 5).

Walking on water (6:19).

There’s a somewhat troubling scripture about water in this gospel. Let’s turn to:

John 7:37,38 In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

What exactly did Jesus mean by this? He might, of course, be simply repeating publicly what he had already told the Samaritan woman at the well:

John 4:14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

But these two statements are quite different. In John 4 the water springs up within the one who receives it. In John 7 it flows outward to nourish others.

Jesus could have been referring to that pure river of water of life that flows out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1) in the kingdom.

Water is a symbol of truth. Maybe it means that as we have received truth from Jesus, we in turn become conveyors of truth to those with whom we come in contact.

There is, however, one large problem: Jesus says that this occurs “as the scripture hath said.” Where does any Old Testament scripture say that out of a believer’s belly shall flow rivers of living water? None do!

It is possible that Jesus is not talking about believers at all. Rather, he could be talking about himself. We could punctuate and divide the words this way:

John 7:37,38 ...Jesus cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and let him drink he that believeth on me. [end 37, begin 38] As the scripture hath said, out of his [Messiah’s!] belly shall flow rivers of living water [making something available for believers to drink].

By saying “his belly,” he means himself as the source of all spiritual blessings, the source of life available to the believer (as we have already quoted in 6:47). Water is a particularly good symbol because even today, it is critically important for life in Israel. We do have Old Testament scriptures that talk about waters being available to heal. Here’s one example:

Zech. 13:1 In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.

A final point: John explains what Jesus meant in verse 39. He does NOT say Jesus was speaking of believers. He says he “spake of the Spirit which they that believe on him should receive.” Water is thus a symbol of spirit.

This may also explain what Jesus had in mind when he talked to Nicodemus:

John 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be [begotten] of water and of spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

At that time water was being used by John the Baptist as a symbol of cleansing the people from their past sins when they repented. But Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit, of which water was only a symbol. Literal water begets no-one. If there is no begetting of the spirit, there is no new creature, there is no life.

### **What is God like?**

So what kind of God emerges from the portrait drawn by John?

John 4:24 God is Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

John 3:33 [**Weymouth**] [those who accept the testimony of Jesus have] solemnly declared that God is true.

1 John 4:16 God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

1 John 1:5 God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

John's great themes of truth, love, and light as seen in the life of Jesus are actually the characteristics of God himself.

Jesus said, "I and my Father are one." (John 10:30) Because of this "oneness," we see God in the life of Jesus. John records more words spoken by Jesus than anyone else. Especially important to us are the five chapters (13 through 17) that record what was spoken the night before the crucifixion. It was then that Jesus asked his Father that we might share the oneness they had:

John 17:21 [I ask] that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.

The next time we discuss John 1:1, we might want to turn immediately to 17:21 and say that we agree that the Logos and God were one, and that we look forward with great anticipation to the time when we will become a part of that oneness as well.

At the end of Matthew's gospel, we learn that "he is risen." (Matt. 28:6) In Mark's gospel, he both rises and ascends. (Mark 16:6,19) In Luke's gospel he rises, he promises the Holy Spirit, and then ascends. John is the one who adds an important promise:

John 14:28 Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you.

This is the promise of his second coming, something we believe has already occurred. However, the world's situation is much like 2000 years ago. We can truly say as did John the Baptist, "there standeth one among you whom you know not." (John 1:26)

3 John 11 [**New English**] My dear friend, do not imitate bad examples, but good ones. The well-doer is a child of God; the evil-doer has never seen God.

The perfect example for us to imitate is our Lord. We are to be "well-doers" and imitate his example to the best of our ability. By keeping our eyes on him, we truly can say that we see God.

Isa. 7:14 The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

"Immanuel" means "God with us." Because of John's faithfulness in recording his gospel, we can repeat the words of Job [42:5]: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee."

(—END—)

*[These were written in roughly the 1990 time frame.]*