

WEEK 41, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 5-7

OVERVIEW:

The Constitution of the King and His Kingdom (chapters 5-7).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we make our way through the Gospel of Matthew, there are several things we must keep in the forefront of our thinking that will help to keep us from going out of bounds.

First of all, understand that Matthew is not written from a chronological standpoint, as are the Gospels of Mark and Luke. I like the way John Phillips explains Matthew's approach:

"He tends to group his material in order to produce a cumulative effect for the point he is making that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews. For example, beginning in chapter 5 (today's reading), we have the Sermon on the Mount – what Jesus TAUGHT. This is followed by a series of miracles in chapters 8 to 9, by no means in the order of occurrence, but which show what Jesus WROUGHT. These miracles are followed in turn by a series of reactions to Jesus, illustrating what people THOUGHT. It seems clear that Matthew's material is arranged so that it can be easily remembered and certainly the contents of his gospel are more easily remembered than the contents of the other synoptics."

Secondly, keep in mind the specific Jewish nature of this Gospel. The Book of Proverbs talks about the importance of identifying landmarks. Proverbs 22:28 says, "Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set." Proverbs 23:10 adds, "Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless." Obviously, from an historical standpoint, this has to do with the importance of identifying the land boundaries, and the importance of allowing them to remain in place. To apply the principle to the Bible itself, however, from a devotional standpoint, we could say that the "ancient landmark" of the Bible that we must never lose sight of or remove– is the Jew! Once we lose sight of the Jew in terms of interpreting the Bible, we will find ourselves in "the fields of the fatherless." For example, there are four Books of the Bible where people allow themselves to get doctrinally discombobulated: Matthew, Acts, Hebrews, and James. Almost every doctrinal controversy and division in the Body of Christ is going to come out of a verse, passage, or chapter in one of those four Books. Coincidentally enough, all four of them have something in common: they are all specifically related to the Jew!

You see, once we lose the "ancient landmark" of the Jew in these Books, we might well end up in "the fields of the fatherless"— believing in works for salvation; or that baptism is a requirement for salvation; or that you can lose your salvation; or that tongues and healing are for today, and on and on, and on. All of those false doctrines are propagated today because somebody lost sight of the Jew in these Books!

So, recognizing the place of the Jew is very important as we come to Matthew's record of the first sermon Jesus ever preached—what we have come to call "The Sermon on the Mount." Keep in mind that all the way through the Old Testament, God had been promising a kingdom to the Jews. They understood that kingdom to be a literal, earthly kingdom where God's ruler (God's "anointed" – Hebrew; God's "Messiah"—Greek) would sit on the throne of David. That kingdom is what the Book of Matthew is all about. It is referred to as the "kingdom of heaven," and Matthew's Gospel is the only Gospel in which the phrase appears—where it is found some 32 times! Matthew's Gospel presents Christ as King of the "kingdom of heaven." (Note that it is also referred to as the "kingdom of Israel" in Acts 1:6.)

In yesterday's reading, the King appears (chapter 2), in chapter 3 He is heralded, and in today's reading (chapter 5 and verse 1), He sits, and delivers the constitution for the kingdom! But recognize, the subject of His sermon isn't "heaven," but the "kingdom of heaven!" (Note 5:3, 10, 19, 20; 7:21) And, recognize also, that the sermon isn't directed to the Gentiles, or to the church of God, but to Jews! (1 Cor. 10:32) Someone might say, "But it's in the New Testament!" Sure it is, but the context of the Book, just like this sermon in chapters 5-7... is strictly Jewish! One of the biblical realities many people seem to overlook when reading the Gospels is the fact that we don't officially enter into the New Testament, according to the Bible's definition, until the death of Christ, which in Matthew's Gospel isn't until chapter 27! Hebrews 9:16-17 says, "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force (is only enforced) AFTER MEN ARE DEAD: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth." In the strictest sense of the word, what that means is that we don't actually enter the New Testament until the very end of each of the Gospels—at the death of Christ. More will be said about this tomorrow.

As we read the Sermon on the Mount today, recognize that our Lord's audience is Old Testament Hebrews who at that time were still under the law. His sermon is designed to present the real intent of the law, and to present the principles of the millennial kingdom (i.e. the "kingdom of heaven"). Yes, there are truths that we as Gentiles in the Church of God can apply devotionally to our lives, but it has no application whatsoever to how people are saved in the church age.

WEEK 41, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 8-10

OVERVIEW:

Christ presents Himself as Israel's King by fulfilling the signs and wonders prophesied of the Messiah in the Old Testament (chapters 8 and 9); the twelve are "sent forth" to preach the "Gospel of the Kingdom" (chapter 10).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

There are several overarching errors Christians tend to make that just about insure that their biblical interpretation and application will not be correct. One of the most critical (and often made!) mistakes is thinking that the Bible is a "Christian" Book that has primarily to do with us— "us," as in "Christians." You say, "How in the world could you say that? Do you mean to tell me that the Bible ISN'T a Christian Book and that it DOESN'T primarily have to do with Christians?" Exactly!

The fact is, if we're ever really going to "get it" in terms of understanding the Bible, we must face the fact that the Bible is a JEWISH BOOK that has to do with a JEWISH KING, and a KINGDOM that has been promised to JEWS! How very stereotypical of Laodiceans (i.e. believers in the last days—Rev. 3:14-22, whose chief characteristic is that they are "lovers of their own selves"—2 Tim. 3:1-2) to think that the Bible is all about us! You see, we tend to get the idea that the theme of the Bible is really all about our salvation (Gentiles)—and "how nice, thoughtful, and unbelievably gracious it will be of God to allow the poor Jews in the last days to have a part in it all!" No, no, no! A thousand times, no! No wonder we get messed up!

The fact is, the Bible is predominantly about a 7000 year period of time in which those of us who comprise His church are merely a 2000 year parenthesis! Now, I must say, it is certainly a glorious parenthesis... a parenthesis that most definitely includes us and benefits us, one that is obviously part of a plan that God ordained before the foundation of the world—but to view the "parenthesis" of the church age as the theme or main subject of the Bible, or to interpret the Old Testament, and even more specifically, the Gospel of Matthew, through "Christian" glasses, is a grave error that will take the most sincere student of the Bible down a zillion rabbit trails, and ultimately down the path to false doctrine!

Always keep in mind that at least 95% of **false** doctrine is really nothing more than **true** Bible doctrine being applied to the wrong group of people and/or to the wrong period of time (i.e. dispensation). And thus, yesterday's comments about the Jew, in a devotional sense, being the "ancient landmark" in the Bible, and how that when that distinction is moved or removed, it causes us to make a doctrinal beeline right into "the fields of the fatherless." (Prov. 22:28; 23:10)

Let me reiterate the fact that much of the problem, particularly in Matthew's Gospel, is that Christians fail to recognize that this Gospel is written to the JEWS, to present Christ as THEIR Messiah-King, over the kingdom promised to THEM in the Old Testament. Just about every commentator in Christianity will talk about the Jewish nature of this Gospel, but will immediately begin to apply the teaching of Matthew's Gospel to Christians living in the Church Age!

The reality is, the Gospel of Matthew wasn't written to teach us about the Church Age—so we must be very careful about making application of it to us—at least until the death of the Testator (after Matthew 27). Again, we must keep in the forefront of our thinking that this Gospel is all about the "Kingdom of Heaven." As we have previously talked about, it is a kingdom promised to the Jews, and that is why Matthew's Gospel is the only Gospel that uses the phrase (33 times). And contrary to what most commentators say, the "Kingdom of Heaven" is not the same as the "Kingdom of God" (a phrase found repeatedly in the other three Gospels), and the two phrases are not used

interchangeably in the New Testament! To say that the "Kingdom of Heaven" and the "Kingdom of God" are the same thing, or that the two phrases are used interchangeably in the New Testament would be as absurd as saying that "God" and "Heaven" are the same thing, and that those two terms are used interchangeably in the Bible. (More will be said about the distinction between the "Kingdom of Heaven" and the "Kingdom of God" in tomorrow's comments.)

But be sure as we make our way through Matthew that you understand that the things contained in this Gospel have to do specifically with God's intention to establish a LITERAL kingdom in Israel over which His Son will preside, and over which He will rule the whole world from a LITERAL throne in the LITERAL rebuilt Temple in the LITERAL earthly Jerusalem. To apply the vast majority of the teaching found in Matthew to the parenthesis we call the Church Age is not only poor hermeneutics, it is an invitation to false doctrine! A great case in point in today's reading is in chapter 8 and verse 12. If we lose sight of the fact that the subject is the "kingdom of heaven," we might end up believing something as biblically ludicrous and ridiculous as someone who has been born again, winding up in Hell!

A few pithy comments about some of the verses in today's reading:

- 8:14 – How interesting that the so-called "first Pope" had a wife!
- 8:16 – Notice that nobody in Jesus' healing line went away "unhealed" because of their "lack of faith."
- 8:21 – Circle the word "Lord" and "me first" in this verse, and notice that the two concepts represented are actually mutually exclusive! Calling Jesus "Lord," and yet, telling Him "me first," however, does characterize the church in the last days! (2 Tim. 2:1-2)
- 8:26 -27 –The wind and the sea recognize the voice of the One who spoke them into existence...and obey! Oh, that humans would have that kind of discernment.
- 8:29 – Demons make an identification the religious leaders of Jesus' day (The Scribes and Pharisees) were never able to make: Jesus is the Son of God!
- 8:32 – The pigs do a "swine dive" off the cliff and commit "sooey-side." (Sorry!)
- 8:34 – The people were more freaked out by Jesus in their midst than by those who were demon possessed in their midst!
- 9:2 – There is a great practical lesson in this verse about doing whatever we can to bring the lost to Jesus!
- 9:11 – Hallelujah! Jesus has time for sinful people like me!
- 9:27 – Even blind people could "see" what the Pharisees couldn't... that Jesus is the promised Messiah!
- 9:35 – The "gospel of the kingdom" is not the same gospel Paul preached or that he identified in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4!
- 9:37-38 – Though we are in a different dispensation, these verses are extremely true!
- 10:1 – To this point, the "twelve" are referred to as "disciples." As they are "sent forth" in this passage (10:5), they receive the title "apostles" (see 10:2). The word "apostle" means "sent one." The word apostle in Latin is the word "missio" from which we get our word "missionary" to refer to ones who are "sent forth."
- 10:5-6 – How about these verses to prove the Jewish nature of this gospel?!
- 10:22 – This verse is a doctrinal back-breaker unless you keep it in the context of the "kingdom of heaven!"

WEEK 41, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 11-13

OVERVIEW:

The refusal of the King and the "Kingdom of Heaven" (chapter 11); the official rejection of the King by the leaders of the Nation of Israel (chapter 12); the Kingdom is hidden in the form of parables (chapter 13).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we continue to pursue getting our doctrinal bearings in the New Testament, and particularly the Gospel of Matthew, as has already been stated, keeping our eye on the Jew and the Jewish audience in this Book is of utmost importance. Regardless of popular Laodicean teaching, the church has not replaced Israel, and the Book of Revelation has some pretty strong things to say about "them which say they are Jews, and are not!" (see Rev. 2:9b and 3:9a) Remember, we are the parenthesis!

Daniel had a prophecy, you'll remember, of 70 weeks of years ($70 \times 7 = 490$ years). The way the prophecy has unfolded historically, is that the Jews "cut off" (i.e. crucified) their Messiah who had come to bring in the Kingdom that had been promised to them after 69 of those weeks of years (483 years) had been completed. What that means though, is that there is still one more week of years (7 years) remaining in Daniel's prophecy! We now refer to that "week of years" as the "Tribulation Period." Keep in mind that the parenthesis that we are presently living in (the Church Age) began after the stoning of Stephen—which was the Nation of Israel's final rejection of the Kingdom—and will close at the Rapture of the church. Once the parenthesis has been removed, the final "week of years" remaining in Daniel's prophecy will kick back in, and God will, in fact, fulfill all of His promises to the Jews and the Nation of Israel in the Old Testament regarding the "Kingdom of Heaven." Again, we are the "PARENTHESIS" in God's plan... certainly not the REPLACEMENT of Israel!

Now, let's talk further about this thing of the "Kingdom of Heaven" that is strictly found in the Gospel written to the Jews (Matthew). Again, note that it is also called the "Kingdom of Israel" in Acts 1:6. Also note, as we talked about yesterday, that by in large, almost every commentator will say that the "Kingdom of Heaven" is the same as the "Kingdom of God." Nothing, however, could be further from the truth! This is where it is important not to leave the Bible in forming our definitions. Running to the Greek for our definition of these "kingdoms" is a key way of insuring that we will never really understand them biblically. If we just let the Bible be the Bible and provide its own definitions, there is a kingdom that was promised to the Nation of Israel. It is a literal, physical, governmental, Davidic, Messianic kingdom on the EARTH. It is this kingdom to which Matthew is emphasizing and to which he specifically identifies as the "Kingdom of Heaven." Many people get confused by the title, "Kingdom of HEAVEN" when it is referring to a literal, physical kingdom on the EARTH, until they recognize that from God's vintage point, the earth is actually the capitol of His heavens, and the place from which He has chosen His plan for the universe to be enacted.

On the other hand, by biblical definition, the "Kingdom of God," is something all together different. Observe the biblical composite of this kingdom:

- Luke 17:20-21 – It doesn't come "with observation" You can't necessarily "observe" it, or say, "here it is" or "there it is," because it is "within you."
- Romans 14:17 – "It is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy."
- (So, though we can't actually "observe" the "Kingdom of God," we can "observe" its affects in the lives of people... i.e. righteousness, peace and joy.)

- 1 Corinthians 4:20 – “It is not in word, but in power.”
- 1 Corinthians 15:50 – “Flesh and blood cannot inherit it.” (Because it’s not a PHYSICAL Kingdom!)
- John 3:3 –You enter it by a spiritual birth. (Because it is a SPIRITUAL Kingdom!)

So, get planted in your mind, the “Kingdom of God” is a SPIRITUAL kingdom, and the “Kingdom of Heaven” is a PHYSICAL kingdom. Now, much of the confusion concerning these two kingdoms is because in the places where Matthew uses the phrase “Kingdom of Heaven,” the parallel accounts in the other Gospels many times contain the phrase “Kingdom of God.” Rather than presumptuously concluding that they are the same thing, however, simply recognize the fact that Jesus Christ is actually the embodiment of both kingdoms, and so while He was on the earth, both kingdoms were present at the same time.

One of the reasons making this distinction between these Kingdoms is so vital is because it affects the actual message that we preach! You see, we preach the “Kingdom of God!” (Acts 8:12) The “Jewish message” of the Kingdom of Heaven was put on hold after Stephen’s final offer to the Nation of Israel in Acts 7. It is a different message with different ramifications and promises that will be preached once again on this earth during Daniel’s 70th week (the Tribulation Period), once we have been removed.

A few pithy comments about some of the verses in today’s reading:

- 11:5 – This lets us know why Matthew recorded the healing ministry of Jesus in chapters 8 and 9. These things were how God told Israel in the Old Testament they would be able to recognize their Messiah-King (see Isa. 53:5, 6; 61:1).
- 11:14 –Malachi 4:5 prophesied that Elijah would come before the establishment of the Day of the Lord (i.e. the “kingdom of heaven”). Recognize, that had Israel received her King, the parenthesis (the Church Age) would have been non-existent. You see, that’s why the church was in a “mystery” form in the Old Testament, and Jesus lets us know that had the Nation of Israel received her Messiah, John the Baptist would have been the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning Elijah’s coming. (Note, all of the other Old Testament prophecies concerning the Day of the Lord could have and would have been fulfilled.) As it stands, Elijah himself will return during the Tribulation Period along with Moses (Moses = the Law, Elijah = the Prophets).
- 12:23 –The people recognize Jesus is the Messiah! (i.e. “the son of David”)
- 12:24 –The Pharisees (religious leaders) don’t recognize Jesus as the Messiah! They attribute the power through which He performed His miracles to Satan!
- 12:31-32 –Note some things about the so-called “unpardonable sin:”
- There are four criteria to committing it:
 - 1) You must be a Jew.
 - 2) Jesus Christ must be publicly manifest in bodily form, performing signs and wonders.
 - 3) You, as a Jew, are an eyewitness of the events in #2.
- Your mind becomes so spiritually disoriented and perverted, and your heart becomes so hardened that you attribute the power through which Christ worked to Satan.
- Note the phrases in verse 32, “in this world” and “in the world to come.” There are only two times that all four criteria can be fulfilled. The first was during the earthly ministry of Jesus from 30 to 33 A.D. The second is during the millennium (“the kingdom of heaven”). Don’t worry, you haven’t, won’t and can’t commit the “unpardonable sin!”

- 13:1 –This is identifying a major shift in Jesus’ ministry. Recognize that the “house” is a term used to refer to Israel. The “sea” is a term used to refer to Gentiles. The “Kingdom of Heaven” now goes into a parable form. Contrary to popular Laodicean teaching, a parable is NOT an earthly story that REVEALS a heavenly truth. A parable is actually a heavenly truth wrapped in an earthly story for the purpose of HIDING the truth from those who don’t really want it anyway. (see 13:11-17)
- 13:55-56 –So much for Mary’s perpetual virginity!

WEEK 41, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 14-16

OVERVIEW:

The feeding of the five thousand (chapter 14); the condemnation of false prophets (chapter 15); the great confession. (chapter 16)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Because of the particular peculiarities of Matthew's Gospel, each of the past four days we have sought to lay down some foundational understandings to keep us "in bounds" doctrinally. Most of our discussion has focused on the importance of identifying the Jew and the Jewish nature of this Gospel, as well as distinguishing between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God. Because the information has been coming in pieces, let's take a few moments to make sure we see how all of the pieces fit together to form the big picture.

The theme of the Bible revolves around a kingdom. The Bible begins with a struggle over a throne (Isaiah 14:13) ... it ends with someone sitting on a throne (Revelation 11:15) ... and everything between is really nothing more than God moving to put His Son on that throne, and the devil doing everything within his power, not only to stop Him, but to put himself on that throne. (2 Thess. 2:4)

The kingdom, as it is described and defined in Scripture, has two distinct dimensions. These two dimensions are delineated in the Word of God through the descriptive phrases, the "Kingdom of God" and the "Kingdom of Heaven." Understanding what and where these kingdoms are as history unfolds through the Bible is, quite simply, the difference between sound doctrine and false doctrine.

The "Kingdom of Heaven," sometimes referred to as the "Kingdom of Israel" (Hosea 1:4, Acts 1:6), is a literal, physical kingdom on the earth, where a literal king is sitting on a literal throne in literal Jerusalem, ruling and reigning governmentally over the entire literal earth. This is the kingdom Isaiah prophesied would be established by the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. (Isaiah 9:6-7) It is interesting to note that the only time the "Kingdom of Heaven" is mentioned by name in the entire New Testament is in the gospel written specifically to the Jews—the Gospel of Matthew—where it appears 33 times! The fact that this phrase is found exclusively in the Gospel of Matthew certainly must arrest our attention to the Jewish scope of its fulfillment! (Note: This literal earthly kingdom is referred to as the Kingdom of Heaven because from heaven's vantage point, God chose the EARTH, which is in the midst of the HEAVENS, as the capital of the universe.)

The Kingdom of God, on the other hand, is not a PHYSICAL kingdom. As we seek to allow the Bible to define and describe this kingdom for us, we find that "it is not meat and drink" (Romans 14:17), it is not "flesh and blood" (1 Corinthians 15:50), it does not come "with observation" (Luke 17:20), we cannot say "here it is" or "there it is" (Luke 17:21), and it is not even something that is expressed with "words," but with "power." (1 Corinthians 4:20). Rather, this kingdom is a SPIRITUAL kingdom that is entered by a spiritual birth (John 3:3-5), and is placed within us. (Luke 17:21)

As we have continuously talked about, distinguishing between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven is paramount, because as Jesus sent forth the Apostles in Matthew 10, He sent them to "preach that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (Matthew 10:7) They were, therefore, sent to preach a "Kingdom of Heaven" message intended specifically for the Jews! (i.e., the Nation of Israel) In fact, they were specifically instructed NOT to carry this message to the Samaritans (half Jew/half Gentile), nor to the Gentiles. (Matthew 10:5)

Interestingly, after the Nation of Israel received their final offer of the Kingdom of Heaven through Stephen's incredible discourse to the ruling council of Israel in Acts 7, in the very next chapter, Philip is led by the Spirit to

preach to the Samaritans! It is important to note, that this is where the transition in the book of Acts actually begins. And you'll also notice, that at this point in the New Testament the message switched from the "Kingdom of Heaven" to the "Kingdom of God." (Acts 8:5,12)

What this reveals to us, is that we must be very careful concerning the message we preach today! We must not proclaim a Kingdom of Heaven message in this dispensation, lest we commit the blasphemy Jesus warned about in Revelation 2:9 (functioning like Jews when we aren't Jews). Likewise, we must be careful not to pattern our methods in this dispensation as we proclaim the Kingdom of God, after those who went proclaiming the Kingdom of Heaven. In this dispensation, we do not follow the model of the Twelve, the Seventy, or even the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2)—we follow the model of the church at Antioch! (Acts 13) The church at Antioch proclaimed the Kingdom of God (the spiritual kingdom), sent out missionaries, and established local churches—because the local church is the vehicle in this dispensation through which our Lord is carrying out His plan to bring worshippers into His spiritual Kingdom...and ultimately, into the physical one!

A few comments about some of the verses in today's reading:

- 14:1 – Herod, like many in positions of power and authority today, fears everything he SHOULDN'T and nothing he SHOULD. He fears John (14:4), the multitude (14:5), and embarrassment (14:9). One thing he DOESN'T fear... is GOD!
- 14:14 – As we behold the sin-sick multitudes all around us, may we, likewise, be moved with compassion!
- 14:24-25 – The storms of life that threaten to overwhelm us, consume us, and destroy us are no problem for Jesus. In the context of the story, maybe we could say, "What threatens to be over our head, is under Jesus' feet!"
- 16:15-19 – This is a highly controversial passage, and historically, has been a breeding ground for much false doctrine. Keep in mind that "the church" to which Jesus is referring in this passage is built upon "THE" Rock! Not Peter, but the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!
- And notice what "keys" it was that Peter, the Apostle to the Jews (!!!), actually received in this passage. It was the "keys of the Kingdom of Heaven!" (16:19) And notice also, that when we move into the early chapters of the Book of Acts, that it is still the "Kingdom of Heaven" message that is being preached—so Peter, with the "keys" to the kingdom, is the predominant voice. Once the final offer of the kingdom was made to the Jewish ruling council through Stephen in Acts 7, however, God immediately makes the transition to the "half Jew/half Gentile" Samaritans in Acts 8. Then, in chapter 9, God calls out the Apostle to the Gentiles (Saul, who would become Paul), and in chapter 10, Saul (Paul) preaches a "Kingdom of God" message to Gentiles just like you and me. From this point forward in the Book of Acts, Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, is the predominant voice.

WEEK 41, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 17-20

OVERVIEW:

The King's glory (chapter 17); the King's rebuke (chapter 18); the King's instructions (chapter 19 verses 1-15); the King's demands (chapters 19:16-20:34).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

In last week's reading, we discussed in great detail the importance of keeping your eye on the Jew when dealing with the New Testament. This often confuses people, because they have assumed that since "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," that it all applies directly to them. We could say it this way however, "Though all of the Bible is written FOR us, not all of the Bible is written TO us."

I like the illustration Jeff Adams uses to make this point. Suppose I let you read a letter my grandfather wrote to me in which he offered the wisdom and insight he had gleaned through his life on the earth. As you're making your way through the letter, you come to a part where my grandfather talks about leaving me \$100,000 in his will. You immediately stop reading, look over at me, and ask, "When do WE collect OUR money?" I would be very quick to tell you that the letter was addressed to me and intended for me, and that I was simply allowing you to glean from the things my grandfather was seeking to teach me!

I think you get the point. When dealing with the Old Testament and some New Testament Books, we as Gentiles, living in the "parenthesis" we call the "Church Age," must be very careful to keep in mind that we are reading someone else's mail! We are the church, so we go to the Bible to get our doctrine from the Books that are addressed specifically to the church (church epistles), or those that are addressed to men who hold positions of leadership in the church (pastoral epistles).

Now, that doesn't mean that we can't glean many things from Books like Matthew (written to the Jews to present a Jewish king over a kingdom promised to Jews), or Hebrews (and just take a wild stab at who you think the Book of Hebrews is addressed to!), or James (and you can't even get past the first verse without being faced with the fact that you're reading someone else's mail! It is specifically addressed "to the twelve tribes"). Again, that's not to say that we can't get anything out of these Books. It simply means we must make certain that we have "rightly divided the Word of truth." It doesn't mean that there are not things that apply spiritually to our lives in a devotional sense, it just means we have to be extremely careful! We must keep in mind that Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts (at least up to chapter 7), provide us an historical perspective of the first coming of Christ from the standpoint of the Nation of Israel. Once the Nation of Israel makes their final rejection of their King and His kingdom in Acts 7, a transition takes place in the Book of Acts:

- From an OLD TESTAMENT structure to a NEW TESTAMENT structure.
- From God dealing with the NATION OF ISRAEL, to dealing with the CHURCH.
- From God working primarily with the JEW, to God working primarily with the GENTILE.
- From the ministry of PETER, the apostle to the Jews (Acts 1-12), to the ministry of PAUL, the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 13-28).
- From God's base of operation being in JERUSALEM, to His base in ANTIOCH.
- And by the time these transitions are made and we get to the end of the Book of Acts, the church is firmly established, and we move right into the letters written by Paul, to the church. In those Books, we are safe.

- They are written specifically to us, and lay out for us doctrine intended specifically for those of us living in this dispensation.

Because of who Paul is (the Apostle to the Gentiles), and because of who the recipients of his letters actually are (churches and pastors of churches), we always need to make certain that anything we are applying to us is something that lines up with what God penned through him (Paul). It was this very principle that caused our brothers and sisters at times in church history to be referred to as "Paulicians." They understood the importance of "rightly dividing the Word of truth," and not applying to us something God promised or intended for the Jews or the Nation of Israel. So, how do we know what to apply and what not to apply from the New Testament Books written to Jews? A simple rule of thumb is that the things God wants us to apply from these Books will be repeated in the writings of Paul.

Keeping these things in mind in today's reading will be helpful. See if you can make the distinction between those things that are specifically related to the Jews and the Nation of Israel, and those that also apply directly to us because they are repeated in the Pauline epistles.

Allow me to just mention a few things about the "Transfiguration" in 17:1-8 –

- 17:1 – Note that Peter, James, and John are the fulfillment of the strange statement the Lord made at the end of chapter 16—that there were some of the people that were listening to Him there who would be eyewitnesses of the Second Coming.
- 17:2 – Note the word "transfigured." In other words, Christ's "figure" was "transformed." When He came to this earth, He couldn't be anything other than what He was—the very glory of the Father. (John 1:16) That glory, however, was veiled in a body of flesh. At the "transfiguration," Christ rolled back His flesh revealing the "glory of His Father" (16:27) that will be His when He returns to the earth at His second coming. (See Peter's comments about this in his incredible statement in 2 Peter 1:16-18.)
- 17:3 – This is actually the first time Moses stepped foot in the Promised Land! What a thrill that must have been for him!
- 17:1 – Back to verse one. Notice when this "second coming" pre-fulfillment actually took place! Matthew tells us that it was "after six days!" If we take those "six days" and plug them into the equation God laid out in 2 Peter 3:8, it lets us know that the second
- coming (which this passage is foreshadowing) will be after 6000 years of human history (6 days X 1000). The really astute folk will balk at such reasoning, citing that Luke's account of the transfiguration says that it was "about eight days" (Luke 9:28). I'm not the sharpest knife in the drawer, but I think that the number that is "after six" and "about eight" just might be seven!!! (Just like it is laid out in Genesis 2:1-3!)
- 17:1-5 – Notice also that in this "perfect" and "complete" picture of the second coming, there just happen to be "seven" that are in attendance: Jesus, Peter, James, John, Moses, Elijah, and God the Father.

WEEK 42, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 21-23

OVERVIEW:

The King's judgments (chapter 21:1-22:14); the King's defense (chapter 22:15-46); the King's denunciation (chapter 23).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we move into today's reading, chapter 21 begins with three signs given to the Nation of Israel. (21:1-22) These three signs are then followed by three parables. (22:23-22:14)

Note: Between Matthew 13 and Matthew 25 there are 12 parables on the Kingdom of heaven, corresponding to the 12 tribes of Israel. They all deal with Israel's rejection of her Messiah, and from a doctrinal standpoint, have no application to a Christian in the church age.

The FIRST SIGN Matthew presents is the COMING of the KING. (21:1-11)

This is what we typically refer to as the "Triumphal Entry," and is the fulfillment of the prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9 – "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." In Matthew 21:9, the people quote Psalm 118:26 – "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD." Note that this passage is an exact fulfillment of what will take place at Christ's Second Coming, keeping in mind that at this point, all of the Old Testament conditions and promises could have been fulfilled without the "parenthesis" of the church age. The "mystery of the church" was something that wasn't revealed until Ephesians 3, and all Old Testament prophecies, as Peter indicated in I Peter 1:10-11, saw no intervening period (i.e. Church Age) between the "sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow."

Note: Through this sign, our Lord revealed Israel's SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.

The SECOND SIGN Matthew presents is the CLEANSING of the TEMPLE. (21:12-16)

The fact that the Temple had become a place of merchandise will give you an idea of Israel's inward spiritual condition. In God's eyes, Israel had become a "den of thieves." Note also that Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7 in 21:13, calling the Temple "my house," which, of course, is a tremendous claim of His deity. And you gotta love it, when the chief priests and scribes accuse Him of receiving the accolades intended for the Messiah, Jesus quotes Psalm 8:2... a Messianic Psalm!

Note: In this sign, our Lord revealed Israel's inward SPIRITUAL CORRUPTION.

The THIRD SIGN Matthew presents is the CURSING of the FIG TREE. (21:17-22)

The fig tree, of course, is clearly a picture of Israel (see Matt. 24:32-33; Luke 13:6-10). And notice in this sign, that the fig tree had leaves—but no fruit. The parallel passage in Luke 13:6-10 reveals that the tree actually had three years to bear fruit, but didn't. By this time in His ministry, Jesus had revealed Himself to Israel for a period of three years, but all they had was an outward show of religion (leaves), but no reality (no fruit).

Note: In this sign, our Lord revealed Israel's OUTWARD FRUITLESSNESS.

In 21:23-29, Jesus comes into the Temple to teach and while He's teaching the chief priests and elders come and question His authority. He answers by pointing them to a question of John the Baptist's authority. They understood that if they said John's authority was from heaven, Jesus would ask them why they didn't get baptized. If they said that John's authority was from men, the people would have beat the devil out of them (which is exactly what they needed!). The people politely kept their mouths shut, and Jesus politely followed their lead.

Jesus then proceeds into three parables that have to do with the Nation of Israel.

Parable #1 – The Parable of the Two Sons. (21:28-32)

The point is, Israel rejected GOD the FATHER!

Parable #2 – The Parable of the Vineyard and the Husbandman. (21:33-46)

The point is, Israel rejected GOD the SON!

Note: Do recognize, however, the future reality of 21:37... "They WILL reverence my Son!" Philippians 2:10-11 says, "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

Parable #3 – The marriage feast (22:1-14).

The point is, Israel rejected GOD the HOLY SPIRIT! (Acts 7:51).

The remainder of chapter 22 (22:15-46) can be broken down by four key questions that are asked:

- A POLITICAL question about TAXES. (22:15-22)
- A DOCTRINAL question about the RESURRECTION. (22:23-33)
- An ETHICAL question about the LAW. (22:34-40)
- A PERSONAL question about the MESSIAH. (22:41-46)

As we then come into chapter 23, Jesus takes the first 12 verses to explain some things to His disciples and the multitude about the scribes and Pharisees—who are sitting right there in the Temple with all of the folks he is addressing! Then in verses 14-33, He speaks directly to the scribes and Pharisees. And, oh buddy, when you read what He says to them, brace for impact! He delivers a series of eight "woes," or judgments.

These "woes" are best seen in comparison and contrast with the eight "Beatitudes" Christ laid down in chapter 5 in the Sermon on the Mount.

Woe #1 (23:13) – The proud "shut up" the kingdom.

Beatitude #1 (5:3) – The "poor in spirit" inherit the kingdom.

Woe #2 (23:14) – "Devourers" receive "damnation."

Beatitude #2 (5:4) – "Mourners" receive "comfort."

Woe #3 (23:15) – The proud send people to "hell."

Beatitude #3 (5:5) – The meek inherit the "earth."

Woe #4 (23:16-22) – Those who hunger and thirst for material gain are found empty.

Beatitude #4 (5:6) – Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are filled.

Woe #5 (23:23-24) – The proud reject mercy because of insignificant details and are judged (i.e. woe!).

Beatitude #5 (5:7) – The merciful shall obtain mercy.

Woe #6 (23:25-28) – The outwardly pure but inwardly rotten will be judged.

Beatitude #6 (5:8) – The inwardly pure (i.e. “pure in heart”) “shall see God.”

Woe # 7 and #8 (23:29-33) – Murderers and persecutors of the righteous are “children of them which killed the prophets.” (i.e. the “devil!”)

Beatitude #7 and #8 (5:9-12) – Peacemakers and those who are persecuted for righteousness are called “children of God.”

Chapter 23 closes with Jesus’ heartfelt lamentation over Jerusalem. And ain’t that last verse a dandy?!! “For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me hence forth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the LORD.” (23:39) In other words, as a nation, they won’t see Him again until the time of Jacob’s trouble (Dan. 21:1; Jer. 30:7), when in one day (Hosea 6:1-3; Isaiah 26:12-21), the nation of Israel will be converted and healed (Rom. 11:26-27; Heb. 8:8-12) as they recognize that He is, in fact, the Messiah (Acts 2:36), and will cry out for His return. (Psalm 44, 68, 74, 79, 83)

WEEK 42, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 24-26

OVERVIEW:

The King's return (chapter 24:1-25:46); the King's preparation (chapter 26:1-56); the King's trial (chapter 26:57-27:26).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The first verse in today's reading is tremendously significant: "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple." (24:1) We could say that once Jesus (the "glory of the Father"—John 1:16), "departed" out of the Temple, He would not return again—and that the Temple was doomed for destruction. Just as in 1 Samuel 4:19–22, it's as if Jesus had written "ICHABOD" over the door, which means "the glory is departed." Jesus walks out and immediately begins to talk about the Temple's destruction. (24:2)

Verse 3 of chapter 24 is also tremendously significant. After leaving the Temple, Jesus and His disciples make their way to the Mount of Olives, and there they ask Him a very important question. They say, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" What is so incredible, is that as they ask this question about the time of the second coming, Jesus is sitting in the exact place where His foot will first touch when He comes!!! (See Zech 14:4). Wow! Does God have a sense of humor, or what?!

Now, chapter 24 is one of those key places in Matthew where people allow themselves to get spiritually disoriented and doctrinally discombobulated. Notice, the context here has nothing whatsoever to do with the church! By the time the events Jesus is about to describe take place, the "parenthesis" of the church has already been raptured out (I Thess. 4:13-17), and Daniel's 70th week has kicked in. The events He describes in chapter 24 and 25 have nothing whatsoever to do with the Church Age, but will be fulfilled during the Tribulation Period, the time of Jacob's Trouble (Dan 12:1; Jer. 30:7). In fact, these very signs Jesus describes are listed in this exact order during the opening of the first six of the Seven Seals in Rev. 6:1-16, which also describes the Tribulation Period.

1st Sign (Matt. 24:5) – FALSE CHRIST = 1st Seal (Rev. 6:1-2).

2nd Sign (Matt. 24:5) – WAR = 2nd Seal (Rev. 6:3-4).

3rd Sign (Matt. 24:7) – FAMINE = 3rd Seal (Rev. 6:5-6).

4th Sign (Matt. 24:7) – PESTILENCE = 4th Seal (Rev. 6:7-8).

5th Sign (Matt. 24:8-9) – MARTYRDOM = 5th Seal (Rev. 6:9-11).

6th Sign (Matt. 24:29) – CHANGES IN SUN, MOON & STARS = 6th Seal (Rev.6:12-16)

Once we identify the context of Matthew 24, some verses start making a whole lot more sense. For example:

- 24:13 – "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

Remember, God will be dealing with "believers" differently in the Tribulation Period than He did in the Church Age. Those who call upon the name of the Lord during the Tribulation Period will not be sealed with the Holy Spirit as they are in this dispensation (see Eph. 1:10-14). "Believers" in the Tribulation Period must endure to the end in order to be saved. That is, if they take the "mark of the beast" (Rev. 13:11-18), their destiny in the lake of fire will be forever sealed.

- 24:14 – “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

Wow, we hear this one a lot! People will say things like, “The sooner we get the gospel to all of the nations of the world, we’ll bring the kingdom in!” Whoa, whoa, whoa! First of all, we don’t preach the “gospel of the kingdom” in this dispensation, and if we did, we’d be asking for a curse according to Gal. 1:7-9! Secondly, the church has already been raptured by the time the 144,000 will fulfill this prophecy in the Tribulation Period!

- 24:31 – “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Recognize that this verse is most certainly referring to a rapture, but it is most certainly not the rapture of the church! (I Thess. 4:13-17) This is a rapture of Jewish saints (Ps. 50:2-5) at the end of the Tribulation (Rev. 11:11-12), just before the Battle of Armageddon. (Isa. 26:20-21)

- 25:1-12 – This passage is another one people use to teach that a believer in the body of Christ can lose their salvation. A few simple observations can help. Notice that the context is clearly stated in verse 1 as “the kingdom of heaven.” By that statement alone, we already know that we’re dealing with a strictly Jewish context. Those involved here are “virgins” (plural), not a “virgin” (singular). “Virgins” are found in the Tribulation Period, not the Church Age (Rev. 14:1-6). The Bride of Christ is a “virgin” (II Cor. 11:1-13), and is always referred to as one collective “virgin,” never “virgins.” The virgins in the passage do not “marry” anyone, they go to “meet” someone, and the someone they go to meet is already married! (Luke 12:36) Note in verse 13 that it is the “Son of man” coming as a married bridegroom, not the “Son of God” coming for His bride!

Most of chapter 26 is familiar and self-explanatory. As you read it, however, let it minister to you in a fresh, new way.

WEEK 42, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 27-28

OVERVIEW:

The King's trial (chapter 26:57-27:26); the King's suffering and death (chapter 27:77-66); the King's victory (chapter 28).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Based on Hebrews 9:16-17, we will actually enter the New Testament in our reading today: "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth." Though that is foreign to our typical thinking about the Gospels, we have learned that applying this biblical principle is key to keeping our bearings in what we commonly refer to as the New Testament.

Obviously, today's reading is rich and full and running over with many things worthy of commentary. Because most of those comments you could make yourself, perhaps the best investment of our time today would be in discussing the time factors involved in the last week of our Saviour's life on the earth.

Traditionally, most have taught through the centuries, that Jesus died on what we call "Good Friday." The tradition was handed down, however, through the Roman Catholic Church. That, in and of itself, does not necessarily make it wrong (because they also believe and teach concerning the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, His bodily resurrection, etc.)—but anything handed down through that church should always raise about ten trillion red flags!

Note: May I go on record here by saying that I absolutely love Roman Catholics... but I absolutely hate their church! To date, a full one-sixth of the world's population professes to be Roman Catholic. While this system refers to itself as "Christian" (the word Catholic actually means "universal Christianity"), they propagate what II Cor. 11:4 calls, "another Jesus, another spirit and another gospel!" The Roman Catholic Church damns people's souls to Hell, while its followers think they are following the Jesus of the Bible! This church is damnably deceptive, and that is the reason for such strong, and seemingly harsh sounding statements. (See how Jesus' commends the church in Ephesus in Rev. 2:1-2 for their "harsh" stance against such false teaching!) Our hearts truly should break for people trapped in that system, and we must constantly be looking for and praying for opportunities to be able to love them past the blinders (2 Cor. 4:4) the enemy is using to hold them captive in his snare (II Tim. 2:26).

And now, back to the discussion at hand. The key problem with the death of Christ taking place on "Good Friday" is that Jesus said in Matthew 12:40 – "For as Jonas (Jonah) was THREE DAYS and THREE NIGHTS in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (See also, Matt.16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:63; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 13:32; 18:33; 24:46; John 2:19). Obviously, if Christ died on Friday afternoon at 3:00 p.m. and was in the grave before 6:00 p.m., there is not enough time for Him to have been in the grave for three days and three nights. The way that most well-meaning people who love God certainly as much as I do, (and to be quite honest, are much more intelligent than me!) get around this, is saying that in the Jewish mind of Jesus' day, any portion of a day was considered the whole. That may well be the case, and may well have been what Jesus had in mind, I've just always had a hard time with how specific Jesus seemed to be about the whole "three days and three nights" thing!

Instead of “Good Friday,” however, let’s consider a “Bad Wednesday” scenario—which fits the biblical timeline far better. (Don’t worry, I’m not the kook that “invented” this line of reasoning, and there are many others who agree with this timeline that has been suggested by Warren Wiersbe and others.)

Keep in mind as we walk through these final days of Jesus’ life, that the Jewish day began at sundown the previous day (i.e. “the evening and the morning we’re the first day” – Gen. 1:5).

- Friday: Jesus came to Bethany six days before Passover (John 12:1).
- Saturday: Triumphant Entry (John 12:12-19 – “on the next day”).
- Sunday: Temple cleansed, fig tree cursed (Mark 11:12-18).
- Monday: Parables, questions, Olivet discourse (Matt. 21:23-25:46).
- Tuesday: Preparation for Passover (Matt. 26:2 – “after two days”).
- Wednesday: Upper room events; Gethsemane; arrest; trials; crucifixion (Matt. 26:20-27:58).
- Thursday: The Passover Sabbath, “an high day” (John 19:31); in tomb.
- Friday: Women brought spices when Passover Sabbath was past (Mark 16:1).
- Saturday: The regular weekly Sabbath.
- Sunday: Christ arose sometime after sunset that evening (remember, “evening and the morning”), and the empty tomb is discovered early Sunday morning.

Certainly, the most important thing is not what we believe about WHEN Christ died, but THAT we believe Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again the third day. It’s just that this question surfaces just about every Easter. Hopefully, this will help.

In light of the fact that the “Friday” timeline was passed down through Roman Catholic tradition, be careful, because the 7th Day Adventists would like for you to believe that moving the day of worship from Saturday (the Sabbath—the 7th day of the week) to Sunday (the 1st day of the week) was also a tradition passed down through that false system, and that God never intended Christians to worship on Sunday, but on Saturday. That, too, is a false teaching!

The “first day of the week” as the God-ordained day of worship for Christians can be substantiated by the following biblical reasons:

- 1) Because we’re Christians and not Jews. (Ex. 31:13 – the Sabbath is a sign between God and Israel)
- 2) The Lord rose from the dead on “the first day of the week.” (Matt. 28:1)
- 3) The Holy Spirit came down on the first day of the week. (Acts 2)
- 4) The disciples met on the first day of the week. (Acts 20:7)
- 5) New Testament giving is to be brought on the first day of the week. (I Cor. 16:1-2)

WEEK 42, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: MARK 1-3

OVERVIEW:

The Servant presented (chapter 1); the Servant in action (chapter 2); the Servant assisted (chapter 3).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we were clearly able to see as we made our way through the Gospel of Matthew, everything in that entire Book was written to JEWS to present Jesus Christ as the KING. In perfect contrast, everything we will see in the entire Gospel of Mark is written to GENTILES to present Jesus Christ as a SERVANT.

Because the Gospel of Mark is written to GENTILES, it has several distinctive features:

1. It does not begin with a genealogy because Gentiles are not typically preoccupied with Jesus' lineage. They have little interest because they have no blood connection with Abraham or David.
2. It does not have an abundance of quotes or references to the Old Testament as did Matthew, because Gentiles are typically unfamiliar with the Old Testament. Mark builds his case not on "signs" and "scripture" like Matthew, but on the most powerful piece of evidence in a Gentile court... eyewitnesses! (Mark 10:46; 14:3; 15:21; 16:1) It is also the only Gospel that gives an explanation of Jewish customs and teachings that a Gentile might not be familiar with. (Mark 12:18; 7:3-4; 14:12; 15:42)
3. It is the shortest of the four gospels, because God knows that Gentiles typically have a short attention span, and are more interested in action than words (i.e. "action movies" are popular not because of their plot, but because of their action. Romans found it entertaining to go to the Coliseum to watch the gladiators—it's action!) Therefore, Mark emphasizes Jesus' actions more than His teachings. For example, whereas Matthew took three entire chapters to record the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), Mark totally skips the Sermon, which chronologically, would have taken place in chapter 1, and goes directly to the action that followed the Sermon.
4. It moves quickly and directly to the main event of the Book... the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which of course, is the main purpose for a Gentile reader. Mark's emphasis is on being a citizen of the "Kingdom of God," not being a citizen of the "Kingdom of Heaven." Note that 40% of this gospel deals with the last eight days of Jesus' life. That is what is significant to Gentiles.

Because the Gospel of Mark is also written to present Jesus Christ as a SERVANT, it likewise, possesses several distinctive features that reflect that emphasis:

1. No genealogy is listed in Mark, not only because of its Gentile audience, but because the record of the birth of a servant is unimportant and insignificant.
2. The key words in this gospel are "straightway" (19 times) and "immediately" (17 times). These are words used to describe the actions of a servant. A servant simply does WHAT he is told, WHEN he is told! The WORDS of a servant pale in comparison to his WORKS. It is interesting to note that it is only in the Gospel of Mark that the hands of Jesus are prominent. (Mark 1:31; 6:2; 8:23, 25; 9:27) Hands are symbolic of the work of a servant.
3. The key verse in the Book, Mark 10:45, portrays Christ's servanthood: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many." Note that this verse also provides a perfect outline of the Book:

- The Servant's Work (chapters 1-10)
- The Servant's Sacrifice (chapters 11-16)

Though Mark clearly presents Christ as a Servant, it is more than apparent that the Holy Spirit directed Mark to emphasize the deity of Christ. At least five times the "Servant of all" (Mark 10:43-44) is referred to as "Son of God," "Son of the Most High God," and "Christ, the Son of the blessed" (Mark 1:1; 3:11; 5:7; 14:61; 15:39). To confirm His deity, Mark records over 20 of Christ's miracles, demonstrating His supreme power and authority over demons, disease, death, and nature. (1:21-28; 1:29-31; 1:32-34; 1:40-45; 2:3-12; 3:1-6; 4:35-41; 5:1-20; 5:25-34; 5:22-24, 35-43; 6:31-44; 6:45-50; 6:51-54; 7:24-30; 7:31-37; 8:1-9; 8:22-26; 9:2-10; 9:14-29; 10:46-52; 11:12-14, 20-26; 16:1-11; 16:19-20)

WEEK 42, DAY 5 TODAY'S READING: MARK 4-6

OVERVIEW:

The Servant conquers a storm (chapter 4); the Servant conquers demons (chapter 5); the Servant sends out His disciples (chapter 6).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Because the narrative nature of the Gospels makes them relatively easy to understand, our comments yesterday focused on the "big picture" of Mark's Gospel, and how it fits into God's plan to present the Lord Jesus Christ "to the Jew first (the Gospel of Matthew) and also to the Gentile (the Gospel of Mark)." (Rom 2:10) Today we will center our attention on the unique authorship of this Book.

As in Matthew, there is no specific verse that states that Mark is actually the author of this Gospel. God did promise, however, to preserve His words, and that certainly would include the title of the Books! Very simply, we know that Mark is the author because God said that this Book is "The Gospel According To St. Mark!" Because of the testimony of Papias, one of the very early "Church Fathers," it is commonly believed that Mark received the "eyewitness" information from the Apostle Peter, who according to 1 Peter 5:13, had won Mark to Christ and disciplined him.

From the Book of Acts we learn that Mark is the surname of the author and that his first name is actually, John. Acts 12:12, 25 and 15:37 state very clearly, "John, whose surname was Mark." John Mark came from a Christian family—the first time that he is mentioned in the Bible being in connection with his mother, whose name was Mary, who had opened her home for prayer when Peter had been imprisoned by Herod. (Acts 12:1-2) His mother's brother was Barnabus, which, of course, meant that John Mark was his nephew. (Col. 4:10)

When Barnabus and Saul (soon to be Paul) returned from Jerusalem in Acts 12, John Mark accompanied them to Antioch. (Acts 12:25) Later, when Barnabus and Saul were sent out of the church of Antioch on their first missionary journey, John Mark was included as a part of their missionary team. (Acts 13:4-5) Not long into their journey, however, John Mark had had "enough," and headed back home. (Acts 13:13)

The Scripture doesn't say why he went home. Perhaps it was tougher than he thought it was going to be. Maybe the pace was too fast, the persecution too intense, the demonic activity too freaky. Maybe he was just plain old homesick! For whatever reason, he went home, and Paul quietly determined, never again!

Sometime later, when Paul and Barnabus were about to head out on their second missionary journey, Barnabus had determined that John Mark would accompany them again. (Acts 15:36-37) Paul looked at the WORK of God and said, "This WORK is too important to God for us to give him a second chance!" (Acts 15:38). Barnabus looked at the CHILD of God, and said, "This SERVANT is too important to God for us NOT to give him a second chance!" Who was right? Your answer will probably be determined by your personality and the gifts of the Spirit you possess. Regardless, the contention between Paul and Barnabus concerning John Mark was so sharp, they decided to part ways. (Acts 15:39-40)

But in time, something tremendously significant had taken place in this sensitive young man's life. In Colossians 4:10-11, John Mark (Marcus) was with Paul, and Paul calls him a "fellow-worker." He's with him again in Philemon 24, where Paul calls him his "fellow-labourer." At the end of Paul's life, he specifically requests his presence, stating, "for he is profitable to me for the ministry." (II Tim. 4:11)

It may have been Paul's rejection that arrested John Mark's attention to see how serious God's work actually is that God used to change him into a faithful servant. Or, it may have been Barnabus' ministry of consolation (see Acts

4:36) that carefully restored him, and gently groomed him into a place of usefulness and profitability in Christ's service. Or, maybe it was solely the ministry of the Holy Spirit of God working through John Mark as he wrote this Gospel that bears his name, revealing to him what true servanthood really is, as he was confronted with it through the life and death of his Saviour. Or, it could have been a combination of all three things! However it happened, praise the Lord, John Mark became a faithful, useable, profitable servant of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Have you blown a major opportunity (or opportunities) to serve the Lord in your past? Have you been prone to discouragement, and defeat in your service for Christ? Are you in need of a second chance... a third... or even a fourth? Allow the restored, renewed, and revived ministry of John Mark through this Gospel God used him to pen-to point you to the one true model of servanthood, our Lord Jesus Christ!

WEEK 43, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: MARK 7-9

OVERVIEW:

The Servant teaches (chapter 7:1-8:26); the Servant reveals that suffering leads to glory (chapter 8:27-9:13); the Servant reveals that power comes from faith (chapter 9:14-29); the servant reveals that service leads to honor (chapter 9:30-50).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

For the past several days we've been laying down the pieces that will give us the "big picture" of Mark's Gospel. Today, let's begin by pulling all the pieces together into a concise, easy-to-open package.

1. Information About The Author.

- His name: Mark
- His name means: "A Defense"
- His mother's name is Mary. (Acts 12:12)
- He is also called John. (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37)
- He is also referred to in scripture as Marcus. (Col. 4:10, Phm. 1:24; I Pet. 5:13)
- His uncle is Barnabus. (Col. 4:10)
- He was a minister or servant on Paul's first missionary journey. (Acts 15:48)
- He quit the team (45 A.D.). (Acts 13:13)
- He was rejected by Paul as a participant on the second missionary journey. (Acts 15:48)
- He became profitable for the ministry again (66 A.D.). (II Tim. 4:11)
- He was a convert of the Apostle Peter. (I Pet. 5:13)

2. Facts About The Gospel

- Approximate date of writing: 57-63 A.D.
- Written from: Jerusalem
- Dates of the recorded events: 26 A.D. – 33 A.D.
- Theme: Christ as the Willing Servant
- Christ is seen as: The Servant of the Lord
- Key Verse: Mark 10:45
- Key Words: Straightway(19 times); Immediately(17 times)
- Chapters: 16
- Verses: 678
- Words: 15,844

3. Features of This Gospel

- This Gospel refers to Christ as Lord only two times in contrast to the other three gospels which refer to Christ as Lord a total of 73 times.
- This Gospel lets us know not only WHAT Christ did in His earthly ministry, but HOW He did it.
- This Gospel contains 11 fulfilled prophecies.

4. A Simple Outline of This Gospel

- The Servant's WORK (Chapters 1-10)
- The Servant's SACRIFICE (Chapters 11-16)

Allow me to offer a few "pithy" comments as we move through today's reading:

- 7:1 – As soon as you see the Scribes and Pharisees approaching, you can bank on it—it ain't gonna be good!
- 7:7 – This little definition will let you know that the Scribes and Pharisees live on in many Bible-believing churches. The tell-tale sign is that they "teach for doctrines the commandments of men." They pride themselves in their "holy standards," and see themselves as those who champion God's Word, while Jesus says they actually "make the Word of God of none effect through [their] tradition." (7:13)
- 7:15 – It's not the stuff we put in our mouths that God is concerned about, it's the things that come out of our mouths!
- 7:20-23 – As in every sin situation, "The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart!"
- 7:34 – This is an unbelievably powerful glimpse into God's heart. Check this out... before Jesus heals this guy, "He sighed." What's that "sigh" about? Jesus recognizes that it wasn't supposed to be this way! Sickness, disease, handicaps, etc., are all part of the curse of sin that we invited upon ourselves.
- 8:12 – This is a different "sigh" here. This is the "How-proud-can-these-Pharisees-get" sigh!
- 8:14 – The disciples get themselves a little worked up because there's only one loaf of bread in the boat between them all, and fail to realize that the very "Bread of life" is in the boat! (We can't be too harsh on them, however, we do it just about every day.)
- 8:29-33 – It is amazing that people can be used of God in one breath (Matt. 16:17), and used of Satan in the next! Don't forget that. (And remember, it's just as true about me and you as it is for the person you just thought of!)
- 9:5-7 – With a bad case of diarrhea of the mouth, Peter is spouting off, talking for the sake of talking! (9:6) And you've just gotta love how the Father interrupts him: "This is my beloved Son: hear him." If I may paraphrase, "Yeah, yeah, Peter, thank you for your wonderful ideas, but it's not time to talk right now—it's time to listen!" I wonder how many times on a daily basis God would like to speak a similar rebuke to us!
- 9: 29 – Maybe this prescription is what it will take for God to answer that unanswered prayer request that you believe to be His will!
- 9:31-32 – We call this "selective hearing." (Ladies, you know that we men have a bad case of it!) We hear what we want to hear—and don't hear what we don't want to hear.
- 9:33-35 – Remember, as Laodiceans (Rev. 3:14–22; 2Tim. 3:1–2), we are characterized biblically by the love of SELF! Sometimes rather than "denying ourSELVES" (8:34), we have simply traded arenas where self vaunts itself. Before coming to Christ, we vaunted ourselves in the WORLD. Many times after coming to Christ, we vaunt ourselves in the CHURCH! Oh, God, help us! (see III John 9)
- 9:43-48 – The Jehovah's False Witnesses would have us believe that hell is actually nothing but the grave. Dig up any grave anywhere on this entire planet, however, and you'll not find it burning with unquenchable fire!
- 9:50 – Is there anyone with whom you need to seek peace today?

WEEK 43, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: MARK 10-13

OVERVIEW:

The Servant's paradoxes (chapter 10); the Servant in Jerusalem (chapters 11-12); the Servant unveils the last days (chapter 13).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we pick up in chapter 10 today, Jesus continues His teaching ministry. The Gospel of Mark centers around what Jesus DID, but not to the exclusion of what He TAUGHT. In this chapter, Jesus reveals that His wisdom is different than the world's, and different from our own natural inclinations. As Jesus teaches in this chapter, His teaching centers around five key paradoxes:

Paradox #1 – Two shall be one. (10:1-12)

Jesus reveals that God's intention in marriage has always been ONE man and woman, for ONE lifetime, because they have become ONE flesh. Jesus reveals that God has not changed His position about the sanctity of marriage. God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), divorce was only ever a concession because of the hardness of men's hearts (Mark 10:5), and the ensuing remarriage that typically follows a divorce leads to adultery (Mark 10:11-12). Choose wisely.

Paradox #2 – Adults must become as children. (10:13-16)

We are constantly striving to get children to act like adults. Jesus said that entrance into the kingdom of God necessitates adults becoming as children. Obviously, Jesus is referring to adults becoming child-LIKE, not child-ISH.

Paradox #3 – The first shall be last; and the last first. (10:17-31)

This passage reveals at least four things that keep people from genuine salvation:

1. A distrust in the fact of Christ's deity (that He IS God!). (10:18; I John 2:22-23)
2. A misguided trust in the purpose of the 10 Commandments. (10:19; Gal. 3:24)
3. A misunderstood trust in our own self-righteousness. (10:20)
4. A misprioritized trust in riches. (10:21-27; I Tim. 6:17-19).

Though not known by name, this "rich young ruler" has become infamous in the fact that he is the only man in Scripture who ever came to Jesus, and went away worse than he came. Sadly, many through the centuries have been just as close to the King and entering His kingdom, yet followed this young man down the same "sorrowful" and "grievous" path of life (and death!).

Paradox #4 – The greatest of all is the servant of all. (10:32-45)

It certainly isn't true in the world's economy, but it most certainly is in God's! The greatest example of this truth, as the passage reveals, is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (10:45) Philippians 2:5-11 provides an incredible explanation of this paradox. Though our Lord Jesus Christ has always eternally existed in perfect equality with the Father in the Godhead, He humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant. He not only humbled Himself by becoming a man, but by dying as a man. But His humility wasn't just that He died, but the fact that He died the most humiliating death of all, "even the death of the cross." It was that very servanthood that caused the Father to exalt Him as the absolute greatest of all, and that has caused us to exalt Him to the place of Lordship in our lives!

Paradox #5 – It is the blind who see, and the seeing who are blind. (10:46-52)

The Scribes and Pharisees thought that they could see perfectly in the spiritual realm, when in reality, they were completely blind. This physically blind man, however, had perfect vision in the spiritual realm. Don't forget to factor into this paradox the fact that Jesus said that one of the chief characteristics of Christians in our day is that we think we see perfectly in the spiritual realm, when in reality we are completely blind. (Rev. 3:17-18)

As we move into chapter 11, recognize that we are already moving into the last eight days of Jesus' life. Again, because this Gospel is written to Gentiles, rather than spending time focusing on citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven like Matthew did in addressing the Jews, Mark makes a beeline toward that glorious truth that allows Gentiles to become citizens of the Kingdom of God: the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

From a "big picture" standpoint, chapters 11 through 13 record events that present Christ, the "servant of all," in three of His primary offices:

- The Servant is presented as KING. (11:1-11)
- The Servant is presented as JUDGE. (11:12-26)
- The Servant is presented as PROPHET. (11:27-13:37)

Note that in chapter 13, Jesus prophesies concerning the final week of years (7 years) from Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 9:24-27) that we call the Tribulation Period.

In this passage He unveils:

- The first half of the Tribulation in 13:5-13.
- The middle of the Tribulation in 13:14-18.
- The last half of the Tribulation in 13:19-27.

Note also the "four watches of the night" in 13:35:

- 1st watch – Called "Even" (i.e. "Evening") – From 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- 2nd watch – Called "Midnight" – From 9 p.m. to 12 a.m.
- 3rd watch – Called "Cockcrowling" – From 12 a.m. to 3 a.m.
- 4th watch – "Morning" – From 3 a.m. to 6 a.m.

In terms of church history, the approximate dates that coincide with these "four watches of the night" are as follows:

- 1st watch – "Evening" – From c. 33 A.D. to c. 533 A.D.
- 2nd watch – "Midnight" – From c. 533 A.D. to c. 1033 A.D.
- 3rd watch – "Cockcrowling" – From c. 1033 A.D. to c. 1533 A.D.
- 4th watch – "Morning" – From c.1533 A.D. to c. 2033 A.D.

We are living in the very final minutes (and maybe even seconds!) of the final watch of the night. Take special note of Jesus' final words in chapter 13: "And what I say unto you I say unto all, WATCH!"

WEEK 43, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: MARK 14-16

OVERVIEW:

The Servant's suffering (chapter 14:1-15:20); the Servant's death (chapter 15:21-41); the Servant's burial (chapter 15:42-47); the Servant's resurrection (chapter 16:1-18); the Servant's ascension (chapter 16:19-20).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Chapters 14 through 16 in today's reading break down into two neatly formed sections:

- The last six PLACES in the Servant's WALK.
- The last four EVENTS in the Servant's WORK.

First of all, let's make our way through... **The last six PLACES in the Servant's WALK.**

Place #1 – In the town of Bethany. (14:1-11)

It was here that Jesus was WORSHIPPED.

This account lets us know that Jesus appreciates worship that is "out of the box!" (14:3) Jesus has already revealed the events of His suffering and death, and nobody seemed to care. (10:32-34) Nobody appeared to have been compassionate enough to even question what He meant! The only question in the disciples' minds was where they would be sitting in the kingdom. (10:35-41) But, then there was Mary. Rather than wait to use her precious ointment to anoint the body of her Savior after His death (14:8), Mary is passionate to lavish her love, adoration, and worship on Him while He was in her midst. Do recognize that when our worship is "outside of the box" and out of the "mainstream," it will cause the "mainstream" to have the same response toward us that they had toward Mary: "They murmured against her." (14:5)

Place #2 – In the upper room. (14:12-26)

It was here that Jesus was BETRAYED.

What an incredible contrast! Coming off of the heels of this glorious act of worship in 14:1-11, Mark records the most hideous act of treason! One of our Lord's very own disciples would betray Him. What must have been going through our Lord's mind and heart as He spent these final hours with His disciples, knowing full well that as He handed the bread that represented His body to Judas, the hands that reached out to receive it were the very hands that, in only minutes, would reach out to receive the money for offering the body of Christ to be crucified.

Place #3 – In the Garden of Gethsemane. (14:27-52)

It was here that Jesus was FORSAKEN.

Peter is a classic example of the old adage, "Talk is cheap." Again, knowing full well what Peter would do in the next few hours, Jesus invites him, James and John to go further than the rest of the disciples (14:33), allowing them to enter, not only another level of information, but another level of intimacy with their Lord. How sad, that at the very time that our Lord, in His humanness, most needed the love and support of His friends (14:34), He was forsaken. First, the "intimate three" (Peter, James and John) slept through His deepest sorrow (14:37), then verse 50 adds, "And they all forsook him, and fled."

Note that the real battle Jesus faced, however, was won before He ever got to the cross! It was the battle fought in Gethsemane between “My will” and “Thy will.” It is, likewise, in the “Gethsemanes” of our life, that battles are won or lost.

Place #4 – In the High Priest’s Palace. (14:53-72)

It was here that Jesus was DENIED.

Not only was Jesus plotted against by the chief priests and the council... lied about by the very ones He had come to redeem... but vehemently denied by the very one who vehemently vowed that he would die himself before denying Him!

A quick overview of Peter’s track record through Mark’s Gospel reveals that Peter:

- ARGUED when he should have SUBMITTED. (8:32-33)
- TALKED when he should have LISTENED. (9:5-7)
- SLEPT when he should have PRAYED. (14:37-38)
- FOUGHT when he should have SURRENDERED. (14:47)
- DENIED when he should have WITNESSED. (14:66-71)

We read those things and are tempted to criticize Peter until we realize that he sounds a whole lot like us! Note also, that Peter was remorseful and repentant (14:72)—and forgiven (John 21).

Place #5 – In Pilate’s Hall. (15:1-20)

It was here that Jesus was CONDEMNED.

In order to be condemned to death, the Jewish council recognized that they had to find some way to convince Pilate that Jesus had been guilty of a capital offense. (John 18:31-32) There was only one possibility, and that was to twist Jesus’ claim to be King as a statement against Rome’s authority, making Him appear as a political revolutionary. Pilate recognizes, however, that the accusations of the chief priests were all bogus and born out of envy. (15:10) Pilate, hoping to avoid having to make a controversial decision concerning Jesus, offers to release one prisoner, either Barabbas or Jesus, thinking that the people certainly would never choose to release someone guilty of murder! The chief priests, however, had “worked” the people ahead of time (15:11), and they cry out for the release of Barabbas, and for Jesus to be crucified (15:12-14). Verse 15 is tremendously revealing: “And so Pilate, willing to content the people.” Mark it down, being a people-pleaser will invariable lead to unbelievable and unthinkable compromise!

Place # 6 – On Golgotha. (15:21-41)

It was here that Jesus was CRUCIFIED.

Mark provides us a time sequence of the crucifixion:

- “The third hour” (15:25) – 9 a.m. – Jesus was nailed to the cross.
- “The sixth hour” (15:33) – 12 noon – Darkness for the next three hours.
- “The ninth hour” (15:34-37) – 3 p.m. – Jesus’ final words—and then He “gave up the ghost.”

The last section of Mark’s Gospel presents... **The last four EVENTS in the Servant’s WORK.**

- Event #1 – The Servant’s DEATH. (15:21-41)
- Event #2 – The Servant’s BURIAL. (15:42-47)

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- Event #3 – The Servant’s RESURRECTION. (16:1-18)
- Event #4 – The Servant’s ASCENSION. (16:19-20)

WEEK 43, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: LUKE 1-3

OVERVIEW:

The introduction of Theophilus (1:1-4); the conception of John the Baptist in Elisabeth, wife of Zacharias (1:5-25); the conception of Jesus in Mary (1:26-38); Mary and Elisabeth's meeting (1:39-56); the birth of John the Baptist (1:57-66); the prophecy of Zacharias (1:67-80); Christ, the baby (2:1-20); Christ, the child (2:21-28); Christ, the youth (2:39-52); the testimony of John the Baptist concerning Christ (3:1-20); the testimony of God the Father and the Spirit concerning Christ (3:21-38).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Today we move into the third of the four Gospels, the Gospel of Luke. Whereas Matthew was written to JEWS to present Christ as KING, and Mark was written to GENTILES (specifically Romans) to present Christ as a SERVANT, Luke was written to GREEKS to present Christ as a MAN.

To really understand God's mindset through Luke in this Gospel, it is important to understand something about Greeks. I Corinthians 1:22 says that just as the Jews require a sign, the Greeks seek after wisdom. That is why historically, the Greeks are synonymous with "philosophy." The word "philosophy" actually means the "love of wisdom" (philos = love; sophia = wisdom). The Greeks loved wisdom and were consumed with the desire to discover the real meaning of life and one's morality. This entire Gospel is written from the vantage point of revealing to the Greeks the fact that Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, is the true meaning of life, and the ultimate standard of morality. Interestingly, the name Luke means "light-giver"—much akin to the Hebrew name Lucifer, meaning "light-bearer." The Gospel of "Luke" shines as a "light to lighten the Gentiles." (2:32) Because every generation has been mightily influenced by the philosophical mindset of the Greeks, this Gospel "gives" tremendous "light" to every generation.

Note to whom this Gospel was actually written: Luke writes in 1:3, "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to thee in order, most excellent THEOPHILUS." Obviously, it was written to a man by the name of Theophilus (a Greek word meaning, "lover of God").

Note also the purpose for which Luke says he wrote this Gospel in 1:4, "That thou (Theophilus) mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed." Theophilus is obviously a believer. Back in 1:1, Luke talks about "those things which are most surely believed among US." Because Luke "had perfect understanding of all things from the very first," (1:3) he says he wanted to write to Theophilus to lay any questions or doubts in his mind to rest ("that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou has been instructed" – 1:4). And you see, that's why we will find as we read this Gospel, that it is given to facts, and is a much more detailed account of the life of our Lord. (See 1:5; 2:1-4; 3:1-2 in today's reading for some great examples of Luke's emphasis on facts!) This is, no doubt, why Luke is the longest of all four Gospels. (Though it doesn't have as many chapters as Matthew, it has about 2,000 more words!) Note, also, in that same train of thought, that the Gospel of Luke is actually the first volume in a two-volume set. Note how the Book of Acts begins: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach." (Acts 1:1) The Gospel of Luke is Volume One, and the Book of Acts is Volume Two.

But as has already been mentioned, not only is Luke's Gospel written to the GREEKS, it is written to present Him as a MAN. That's why the phrase "Son of man" is found 26 times in this Book. It focuses our attention on Jesus' humanity, and all through this Book, Luke's account will highlight the human element of the Lord Jesus Christ. We will see Him weeping over those who rejected Him (19:41); touching the untouchable (5:13); being touched by the unthinkable (a

prostitute) — (7:39); and seeking the lost (5:31-32; 9:56; 19:10). In fact, seven different times in this Book Jesus invites lost people to follow Him.

Because this Gospel is written to present Christ as a MAN, it is also reflected in Luke's record of His genealogy. Remember, Matthew is a Jewish Gospel, so His genealogy begins by identifying Christ with David, but runs His family line beginning with Abraham, the Father of the Nation of Israel. Luke, however, traces Christ's genealogy through His "human" mother, but takes it back to Adam, the first "man." (Luke 3:38)

Though Luke presents Christ as 100% man, don't fail to realize that at the same time, He is 100% God. This, of course, is a major hang-up for Jehovah's False Witnesses. They like to throw out verses like Luke 2:40 in today's reading as proof that Jesus wasn't and couldn't have been God. All they do, however, is prove that they don't believe the Bible, and that they don't have the Spirit of God in them so they can even understand the Bible! (I Cor. 2:14) 1 Timothy 3:16 calls Christ's deity: the "mystery of godliness." The verse defines the "mystery of godliness" as the fact that "GOD was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

WEEK 43, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: LUKE 4-6

OVERVIEW:

The testimony of Satan concerning Christ as the Son of God (4:1-13); the testimony of the Scriptures (4:14-30); the testimony of demons (4:31-44); Jesus is the difference between failure and success (5:1-11); Jesus is the difference between guilt and forgiveness (5:17-26); Jesus is the difference between the old and the new (5:27-39); a new kind of Sabbath (6:1-11); a new kind of nation (6:12-19); a new kind of blessedness (6:20-49).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

If you were to be asked who it was that God used to provide the most content in the New Testament, that would be a no-brainer, right? The OBVIOUS answer is Paul. But though Paul is the obvious answer, the only problem is, he just doesn't happen to be the RIGHT one! That's right! Though Paul was used of God to write more BOOKS of the New Testament than any other writer, it is actually Luke who is the one God used to provide the most actual content. (Note: This is based on the amount of words and verses written by Luke in Luke and Acts, compared with the words and verses in the 13 Books known to be authored by Paul. A great case could be made that Paul may have authored the Book of Hebrews during his 40 days and 40 nights in Arabia, but it would be impossible to be dogmatic about it since the Holy Spirit did not inspire its human author to include his name.)

In yesterday's comments we spent most of our time providing information to help us keep our bearings as we move through the Gospel of Luke. But who is this "Luke" anyway? Colossians 4:14 refers to him as "the beloved physician." It should be noted, that God's choice of words concerning him is very specific. It is NOT, "Luke, the beloved DOCTOR," but "Luke, the beloved PHYSICIAN." Why make such a "to-do" about such a seemingly insignificant observation? Well, above everything else, because "every word of God is pure!" (Prov. 30:5) God chooses His words very carefully. There are no indiscriminate or random words in the entire Bible. He specifically calls Luke a "physician" because He wants to make a distinction between his occupation, and the occupation of the "doctors" of his day. When God refers to "doctors" in the Bible, (Luke 2:46; 5:17; Acts 5:34), they were actually theologians who were so engulfed in head knowledge about God, that they actually missed God when He was right in front of them! It is amazing how many people know all kinds of things about God and the Bible, but in the midst of all of their knowledge, never really get to know HIM! Perhaps the reason for such a strange divergence is that the Bible is not an end in itself... it is a means to an end. The end, however, is not to get to know the BIBLE, but to get to know GOD! Why do we read the Owner's Manual in the glove box of our cars? To get to know the manual, or to get to know the car? Obviously, the car! In that same way, God provided us with His "Owner's Manual" (the Bible), for the purpose of getting to know HIM!

It is also interesting to note that there are only two physicians who are actually mentioned in the entire Bible. Luke is obviously one of them, and our Lord Jesus Christ is the other. Though they both possessed the ability to heal physically (Jesus through miracles, and Luke through medicine), both were more concerned about the spiritual healing needed in men's souls, than the healing needed in men's bodies! Jesus is, in fact, both the Physician and the Cure Himself! Luke, the beloved physician, pointed men to the Great Physician and His glorious cure.

As we have provided for both Matthew and Mark's Gospel, the following is a basic summary of the Gospel of Luke:

1. Information About The Author:

- His name: Luke
- His name means "Light-giving"

- He was a Physician. (Col. 4:14)
- He wrote this Gospel to Theophilus. (Luke 1:3)
- He also wrote the Book of Acts. (Acts 1:1)
- He joins the 2nd missionary team in Troas. (Acts 16:1-10)
- He stays behind in Philippi. (Acts 17:1)
- He rejoins the missionary team on their 3rd journey. (Acts 20:1-6)
- He journey's with Paul to Rome. (Acts 27:12)
- He is also referred to in scripture as Lucas. (Philemon 1:23, 24)

2. Facts About This Gospel:

- Approximate date of writing: 60 A.D.
- Written from Philippi
- Dates of the recorded events: 6 B.C. – 33 A.D.
- Theme: Christ as the ideal man
- Christ is seen in this Gospel as the Son of man
- Key verse: Luke 19:10
- Key word: Man (131 times)
- Chapters: 24
- Verses: 1,151
- Words: 27,09

3. Features of This Gospel:

- Mark is the only Gospel that records the parable of the Good Samaritan.
- Mark is the only Gospel that records the cleansing of the 10 Lepers.
- This Gospel contains 9 fulfilled prophecies.

4. A Simple Outline Of This Gospel: The Four Periods...

- Period #1 - A time of Preparation. (Chapters 1-3)
- Period #2 - A time of Identification. (Chapters 4-8)
- Period #3 - A time of Instruction. (Chapters 9-18)
- Period #4 - A time of Culmination. (Chapters 19-24)

WEEK 44, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: LUKE 7-9

OVERVIEW:

Jesus' response to the faith of the centurion (7:1-10); Jesus' response to the sorrow of the widow (7:11-17); Jesus' response to the doubt of John the Baptist (7:18-35); Jesus' response to the love of a woman with a sordid past (7:36-50); Jesus teaches His disciples about receiving God's Word (8:1-21); Jesus tests His disciples concerning applying God's Word (8:22-56); Jesus sends out His 12 disciples (9:1- 11); Jesus feeds the 5000 (9:12-17); Jesus teaches His disciples about His person, His sacrifice and His kingdom (9:18-36); Jesus endures His disciples' lack of power, love, and surrender (9:37-62).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As has been mentioned several times since beginning the Gospels, because they are the record of actual events, for the most part, they are easily understood. Though each event is power-packed and full of practical application, the nature of the 52 Weeks of Pursuit does not lend itself to commenting in every place the passage is actually screaming for it. Make as much practical application as you possibly can as you make your way through today's reading, but let's do something a little different today. Let's focus our attention on one particular passage—the story of "The Pharisee and the Prostitute" in Luke 7:36-50. It provides some incredible lessons in contrast between religious leaders and common, sinful people.

Lesson #1 –

The Pharisee was willing to interrupt his SCHEDULE to have JESUS in his PRESENCE.

The Prostitute was willing for the PRESENCE of JESUS to interrupt her LIFE! (7:36)

For Personal Examination:

Do I want Jesus in MY presence? Or, do I want JESUS' presence in me?

Do I want to have HIM? Or, do I want Him to have ME?

Lesson #2 –

The Pharisee wanted Jesus in HIS presence, but was seeking to SAVE face.

The Prostitute wanted the presence of Jesus in HER, and was seeking HIS face. (7:36-38, 44-46)

For Personal Examination:

What am I seeking to HOLD on to, while I'm telling Jesus I want His PRESENCE in me?

Do I want as much of the presence of Jesus in me as I can HAVE... or, do I want as much of the presence of Jesus in me as I can HAVE and not lose my IDENTITY?

Lesson #3 –

Jesus heard what the Pharisee was saying in HIS heart.

Jesus also heard what the Prostitute was saying in HER heart. (7:39, 44-47)

For Personal Examination:

What does Jesus HEAR when He listens to MY heart?

Would Jesus HEAR my worship if it weren't expressed with WORDS?

Lesson #4 –

The Prostitute was 10 times the sinner the Pharisee was, however, our sinfulness is not determined by the amount of sin-debt we incur, but by the amount we have to pay on the debt. (7:40-42)

Note: We all had absolutely NOTHING to pay on our debt!

For Personal Examination:

Do I really understand my SINFULNESS before God?

Do I fully comprehend the significance of the fact that regardless of the amount of my sin, I had “nothing to pay” on the debt?

Lesson #5 –

The Pharisee’s blindness to his own sinfulness DIMINISHED his capacity to love Jesus.

The Prostitute’s overwhelming awareness of her own sinfulness ENLARGED her capacity to love Jesus. (7:40-43, 47)

Note: How you view your own sinfulness affects your ability to love Jesus!

For Personal Examination:

Do I fully comprehend the significance of my own sin when I view the price Jesus paid for sin through His death on the cross?

Lesson #6 –

The Pharisee was so BLIND to his own sin, it OPENED his eyes to the Prostitute’s sinfulness.

The Prostitute’s eyes were so OPEN to her own sinfulness, she was BLINDED to everyone else’s. (7:36-39)

Note: How you view your own sinfulness affects your ability to see!

For Personal Examination:

Has pride BLINDED my eyes to my OWN sin, and OPENED my eyes to the sin of OTHERS?

Lesson #7 –

The Pharisee’s “worship” in the presence of Christ was based on his OWN WORTHINESS.

The Prostitute’s worship in presence of Christ was based on CHRIST’S WORTHINESS. (7:40-50)

Note Jesus’ explanation of the Pharisee’s “worship:”

1. You didn’t THINK enough of Me to even provide water to wash my feet.
2. You weren’t EXCITED enough about receiving Me into your presence to even provide an affectionate greeting.
3. You weren’t CONSIDERATE enough of Me to go out of your way to provide for My head to be anointed with oil.

Note the demonstration of the Prostitute’s worship:

- 1) She broke open the box of her most prized treasure to release the fragrance of true worship.
- 2) She expressed a broken and contrite heart through her tears used to wash Jesus’ feet.
- 3) She dismantled HER glory (her hair—I Cor. 11:15) to give HIM glory.
- 4) She overflowed in her affection and exaltation of Christ by ceaselessly kissing His feet.

For Personal Examination:

What is the “box” of my most prized treasure that Jesus is waiting for me to break open to release the fragrance of my true worship?

Has my heart become calloused and cold, unable to be broken into tears to wash Jesus’ feet?

Have I become so consumed with my ego and self-glory that I’m unwilling to dismantle it for His glory?

Is my affection and exaltation of Christ apparent by my humility toward Him? (i.e. kissing His feet)

Will I be a box-breaking, oil-pouring, tear-washing, glory-sacrificing, foot-kissing, face-seeking worshipper of the Lord Jesus Christ today?

WEEK 44, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: LUKE 10-12

OVERVIEW:

Jesus sends out "the 70" (10:1-24); Jesus teaches about who our neighbor is (10:25-37); Jesus teaches us the importance of worship (10:38-42); Jesus models the importance of prayer (11:1); Jesus provides a pattern for prayer (11:2-4); Jesus teaches about persistence in prayer (11:5-8); Jesus offers promises concerning prayer (11:9-13); Jesus teaches about the devil (11:14-28); Jesus' illustrations concerning the crowds... Jonah (11:29-30, 32); Solomon (11:31); Light (11:33-36); Jesus teaches about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (11:37-54); Jesus warns about hypocrisy (12:1-12); Jesus warns about covetousness (12:13-21); Jesus warns about worrying (12:22-34); Jesus warns about carelessness (12:35-53); Jesus warns about lack of discernment and lack of diligence in spiritual matters (12:54-59).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we continue to make our way through the Gospel of Luke, note the fact that there is a phrase that appears more times in this Book than any other Book in the New Testament. That phrase is "the Kingdom of God." As we came through Matthew's Gospel, we talked quite a bit about the distinction between the two phrases, the "Kingdom of Heaven" and the "Kingdom of God." It is interesting that the phrase the "Kingdom of heaven" is found 33 times in 32 verses in Matthew, and the phrase the "Kingdom of God" is found 33 times in 32 verses in Luke!

Do you remember the difference between these two kingdoms? The "Kingdom of Heaven" is the kingdom promised to the Jews all through the Old Testament, and is sometimes referred to as the "Kingdom of Israel." (Acts 1:6; Hosea 1:4) It is a literal, physical, earthly, governmental, messianic, Davidic kingdom over which Jesus rules as King from His throne in Jerusalem. The "Kingdom of God," on the other hand, is a spiritual kingdom that cannot be seen or touched, where Jesus rules as King on the throne of men's hearts by way of a spiritual birth (Luke 17:20-21; Rom 14:17; I Cor. 4:20; 15:50; John 3:3). Keep in mind as you're reading this Gospel that the reason Luke emphasizes the "Kingdom of God" is because God's goal through him in this Gospel is to present the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of man who came "to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10)

It is interesting to note that the Jews of Jesus' day were totally preoccupied with the "Kingdom of Heaven," and therefore, were totally oblivious to their need to be born into the "Kingdom of God." It made them blind, selfish, and self-serving. Just as interesting is the fact that the Christians of our day are totally preoccupied with the "Kingdom of God," and therefore, are totally oblivious to the "Kingdom of Heaven." It, likewise, makes us blind, selfish and self-serving. (Rev. 3:14-22; II Tim. 3:1-2) It causes us to claim the promise of eternal life, while we go about our lives seeking to build our own literal, physical kingdom on the earth! God's intention, however, is that now that we have been born into His spiritual kingdom, that we "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God," and that we "set [our] affection on things above, not on things on the earth." (Col. 3:1-2) God wants the literal, physical kingdom in which our Lord Jesus Christ will finally receive the "glory due unto his name" (I Chron. 16:29; Ps. 29:2; 96:8), to so be in our hearts, that it even causes us to continuously pray for it to come! (Matt. 6:10) As you can see, keeping these two kingdoms straight not only has key DOCTRINAL implications, but key PRACTICAL implications as well.

Perhaps it's because of this emphasis in Luke's Gospel that he is the only Gospel writer that includes the sending out of the 70 found in today's reading (10:1-24). Why 70, and not 7, 17, or 67? Just as "the 12" apostles are associated with the 12 sons of Jacob, it appears that "the 70" must also have some significant association. Though it is more difficult an association to determine than with "the 12," it seems apparent that "the 70" are associated with the 70 nations found in Genesis 10. Because Luke focuses on the universality of the "Kingdom of God" to all peoples and all nations, it is very fitting that his Gospel would include "the 70" being sent to spread the message to all nations.

Other little “tid-bits” to glean along the way in today’s reading:

10:1-42 – Notice in this chapter the three places that are described, and the three things we are to do in each:

- The Harvest Field (10:1-24): We Are to REPRESENT Him.
- The Highway (10:25-37): We Are to MODEL Him.
- The Home (10:38-42): We Are to WORSHIP Him.

10:23-24 – I hope this is the way you feel about the things the Lord has graciously allowed you to see in His Word and for allowing you to be a part of in His kingdom.

11:1 – It is interesting that the disciples heard Jesus preach the greatest sermons that have ever been preached, but they never said, “Lord, teach us to preach.” They saw Him perform the most incredible miracles that have ever been performed, but they never said, “Lord, teach us to do miracles.” But they heard Him pray, and couldn’t help but say, “Lord, teach us to pray.” What a connection with the Father Jesus must have had when He prayed! What an intimacy with His Father they must have witnessed. Oh, may we learn what it really is to pray!

11:24-26 – The application of these verses to us is to constantly realize that it is not enough that we simply be set apart FROM the world, but that we be set apart UNTO God! (John 17:11-17) It is not enough that we simply put OFF the OLD man, but that we put ON the NEW man! (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:8-14) It is not enough that we simply no longer SERVE SIN, but that we SERVE RIGHTEOUSNESS! (Rom. 6:17-18)

WEEK 44, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: LUKE 13-15

OVERVIEW:

Jesus provides pertinent answers to pertinent questions (13:1-35); Jesus addresses the guests in a Pharisee's house on the Sabbath day (14:1-35); Jesus gives three illustrations to reveal God's heart for the lost (15:1-32).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we move into chapter 13 today, Jesus continues His journey toward Jerusalem (see 9:51; 13:22; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28). As He makes His way, He is faced with four questions that provide a clean breakdown of the chapter. He is asked:

1) A **POLITICAL** question about **JUSTICE**. (13:1-9)

Jesus knows that anything He says about Pilate will certainly make it to Jerusalem before He does! Verses 3 and 4 teach us not to assume that human tragedies are divine punishments.

2) A **LEGAL** question about the **SABBATH**. (13:10-21)

It could only have been the pride and self-righteousness of the Pharisees that could cause them not to see that Jesus "loosing" this poor woman from Satan's bond and her suffering on the Sabbath (13:12), was no different from them "loosing" their ox or donkey from the stall to get water on the Sabbath. (13:15) Pride and self-righteousness still cause that same blindness and that same hideous judgmental spirit today.

3) A **THEOLOGICAL** question about **SALVATION**. (13:22-30)

Notice that Jesus turned the man's general question about how many would be saved, to a personal question about whether or not HE would be saved. It is amazing how many people to this day ask great, spiritual, theological questions that they have no intention of obeying or practicing—even if they receive the answer!

4) A **PERSONAL** question about **DEATH**. (13:31-35)

Though there is not a specific question asked in these verse, Jesus' response to the statement in verse 31 is as if asked a question about whether he was concerned about Herod's desire to kill Him. Jesus responds by saying, in effect, that His life was on God's timetable, not man's. (See John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 13:1; 17:1) Recognize today (and every day), that your life is on that same time schedule!

In chapter 14, Jesus is invited to come over to one of the chief Pharisee's house for dinner after church, so to speak. Jesus quickly recognizes that He is intended to be the main entrée, so rather than be eaten alive, He takes command of the room, and faces all those in attendance with their own personal issues.

- In 14:1-6, He begins with the Pharisees, making them face their false spirituality, by healing someone on the Sabbath.
- In 14:7-11, Jesus then faces the other guests with their self-promotion, by pointing out that they had all sought to position themselves in the room to make themselves appear important.
- In 14:12-14, Jesus faces the host with the fact that the people he had invited were actually invited to fulfill an obligation to them, or to impose a debt on them. It makes you wonder, where are the people who don't have an ulterior motive behind their generosity? Even when we do something for nothing in return, the ulterior motive can be that we wanted to be viewed as someone who does things for nothing in return. Wow!
- In 14:15-24, Jesus is facing the Jews with the fact that they were about to miss the invitation of their Messiah, and that He would then turn to the Gentiles. Notice that the more things change, the more the things remain the same. People miss Jesus for the same exact reasons in the 21st century that they did in the 1st century.

They miss Him because they are:

- 1) Relishing in their riches (14:18).
 - 2) Climbing in their career (14:19).
 - 3) Focused on their family (14:20).
- In 14:25-35, Jesus leaves the Pharisee's house, and then faces the multitudes with the fact that He wasn't looking for people who wanted to simply add Him on to their already cluttered life, He was looking for those who would see their relationship with Him as the most important relationship of life, and see Him as life itself! Jesus was never interested in self-seeking consumers, but self-denying disciples.

As has been pointed out repeatedly throughout the 52 Weeks of Pursuit, in contrast to the consumer driven messages that are preached in the Laodicean Church Period, true, biblical, Spirit-anointed preaching is at least two-thirds negative! (See Jer. 1:10 and 2 Tim. 4:2.) Facing people's issues as Jesus has just done in chapters 13 and 14 wouldn't fly too well today. If someone preached like that today, you might could expect to hear questions and comments like:

- "Why does our message need to be so negative?"
- "People don't want to come to church and have to feel bad."
- "I'm afraid to bring visitors to church because the strong preaching may push them away."
- "I'm just not being fed."
- "I'm looking for something that has a better 'ministry' to my kids."

But the good news is, Jesus wasn't all negative! In chapter 15 He pulls out three illustrations that reveal the heart of God for His lost creation. Jesus shows us that our Heavenly Father is like:

- A Tender Shepherd. (15:1-3)
- A Diligent Housewife. (15:8-10)
- A Longing Dad. (15:11-32)

He searches... and seeks... and longs... and sacrifices to see that which was lost—returned to its rightful place. Praise the Lord, our rightful place is with Him!

WEEK 44, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: LUKE 16-18

OVERVIEW:

Jesus teaches about stewardship (16:1-13); Jesus teaches about covetousness (16:14-31); Jesus teaches about forgiveness (17:1-6); Jesus teaches about faithfulness (17:7-10); Jesus teaches about thankfulness (17:11-19); Jesus teaches about preparedness (17:20-37); a lesson to be learned from a persistent widow (18:1-8); a lesson to be learned from a proud Pharisee (18:9-17); a lesson to be learned from a disprioritized ruler (18:18-34); a lesson to be learned from a pressing beggar (18:35-43).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

There is a tremendous amount of action and pertinent information in today's reading—certainly more than there is space in this venue to comment sufficiently. Our thoughts today will center around key subjects that are addressed in these chapters that have particular and significant application for believers living in these last days.

Subject #1 – STEWARDSHIP. (16:1-13)

Though the circumstances were somewhat different for the steward mentioned in this passage, each of us are quickly moving toward the ultimate accounting of our stewardship at the Judgment Seat of Christ. (II Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10, 12) Just as this steward in 16:2, we will "give an account of our stewardship." The key determiner on that day will be the answer to the simple question, "What did we do with what He entrusted to us?" The New Testament is clear that we will give an account of our stewardship of:

The **LIFE** of God. (Gen. 2:7; Rom 5:12; Col. 1:26-27; I John 5:11)

We have been given the ability to LIVE RIGHTEOUSLY.

The **LOVE** of God. (Rom. 5:5; Mark 12:28-31; I John 4:14-17,19; I Thess. 4:9)

We have been given the ability to LOVE DIVINELY.

The **GOSPEL** of God. (I Thess. 2:4; I Tim. 1:11; 6:20)

We have been given the ability to impact SOULS ETERNALLY.

The **GIFTS** of God. (I Peter 4:10-11; I Cor. 3:10)

We have been given the ability to be SERVE POWERFULLY.

The **RESOURCES** of God.

Money – Luke 16:11;

Time – Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5;

Talents – Matt. 25:14-27;

People – II Tim. 1:5; 3:15)

We have been given the ability to manage RESOURCES WISELY.

Verse 11 of chapter 16 is a doozy. I am convinced that many Laodiceans never reach anybody with the gospel and are never truly able to minister effectively because God is unwilling to entrust to them what He truly treasures, simply because of their unfaithfulness to Him with money.

If verse 11 is a doozy, then verse 13 is a blockbuster for our generation of believers! We have convinced ourselves that this verse has been true for everybody but us, and that we somehow have the ability to love both God and money. What part of "CANNOT" do we not understand? When God looks at our lives, does He think we love Him and hate money, or does He think we hate Him and love money? Does He think we hold to Him and despise money, or hold money and despise Him? Many 21st century Christians are attempting to love money and love God at the same time, but Jesus said it simply "CANNOT" be done!

Subject #2 – HELL. (16:19-31)

It is clear that prior to Christ's resurrection, believers who died were held in a place of paradise called Abraham's bosom. It was obviously close to the place of punishment called Hell where all unbelievers were located, being separated by a great gulf, or gaping opening. (16:26) Notice that Hell is a real place, where real people go, and experience real suffering and torment. Notice that in Hell, the rich man had EYES and could SEE (16:23a); had a BODY and could FEEL (16:23b); had a TONGUE and experienced THIRST (16:24); had a MOUTH and could TALK (16:27); and evidently, had a MIND and could REASON (16:28).

The passage also teaches us that there are actually no unbelievers in Hell. Unbelief may have gotten them there, but as soon as they open their eyes in Hell, they become believers! Sadly, it is eternally too late.

The passage also teaches that people in Hell have compassion for the lost (16:28). Would to God that believers would have the same passion and compassion for souls that this lost rich man had. Sometimes we think that if God would just do some miraculous thing, our lost family and friends would come to Christ. The passage teaches us that if they refuse to believe the Bible, they wouldn't believe even if someone rose from the dead to speak to them. They already proved that by not believing in the resurrected Christ!

Subject #3 – FORGIVENESS. (17:1-6)

In this passage the Lord teaches us about the importance of forgiveness. When someone offends us, immediately God's grace kicks in to be more than sufficient to help us to bear it. (II Cor. 12:9; I Cor. 10:13) Hebrews 12:15 teaches us, however, that we have the ability to "fail the grace of God" (i.e. refuse to apply His grace). If we refuse to apply that grace, Hebrews 12:15 says that our unforgiving spirit will cause a "root of bitterness" to spring up in us and "trouble" us, and "defile many" people around us, even leading us into sexual sin! (Heb. 12:16) Don't ever underestimate the importance of forgiveness!

Subject #4 – THANKFULNESS. (17:11-19)

As you read this story about these 10 lepers, recognize that, generally speaking, believers in our day are characterized by "the nine" rather than the "one." Jesus' question is a good one in the Laodicean Age, "Where are the nine?" (17:17)

A couple of cross references to keep in mind:

- 2 Timothy 3:2 says that being "unthankful" is as characteristic of believers in our day as being "lovers of our own selves!"
- Romans 1:21 reveals that being "unthankful" is one of the first steps toward a "reprobate mind." (Romans 1:28) Hey, this is serious stuff!
- 1 Thessalonians 5:18 teaches us that it is impossible to be in the perfect will of God and not be thankful! Again, pretty serious stuff!

Subject #5 – RIGHTEOUSNESS. (18:9-14)

Any way you slice it, we who hold to the fundamentals of Bible-believing Christianity run the greatest risk of

becoming the modern day Pharisees. Have you become Pharisaical? Verse 9 of chapter 18 lets us know that there are two tell-tale signs:

- 1) Trusting in your own righteous. (i.e. Trusting what you "do" FOR Christ, rather than who you "are" IN Christ)
- 2) Thinking you're more spiritual than others.

What do you trust as the true source of your righteousness? Paul talked about those who are "ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." (Rom. 10:3) God's righteousness could never (on either side of salvation!) be ACHIEVED! It can only be RECEIVED! Paul cried out in Philippians 3:9 the desire to "be found in him, NOT HAVING MINE OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS, which is of the law (i.e. what I do for God), but that which is through the faith of Christ (i.e. what Christ does for me), the righteousness which is of God by faith."

And, what do you honestly think when you look at others? Do you secretly think that you are on a higher plane than they are because of what you do or do not do? It's spooky, folks! We must be careful!

WEEK 44, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: LUKE 19-21

OVERVIEW:

Jesus as the Saviour Who seeks the lost (19:1-10); Jesus as the Master Who rewards the faithful (19:11-27); Jesus as the King Who offers peace (19:28-48); a question concerning John the Baptist (20:1-19); a question concerning Moses (20:27-40); a question concerning David (20:41-44); a warning concerning the Scribes (20:45-47); a teaching concerning giving (21:1-4); the revealing of the first half of the Tribulation (21:5-19); the revealing of the middle of the Tribulation (21:20-24); the revealing of the last half of the Tribulation (21:25-27); the closing admonitions (21:28-36).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we move into chapter 19 in Luke's Gospel, keep in mind that we are also moving into the last week of Jesus' earthly life. He is getting closer and closer to Jerusalem where two groups of people passionately await His arrival. Some are passionately preparing to exalt a King, while others are passionately preparing to execute a fraud.

As Jesus comes into Jericho in chapter 19, Luke's account centers around a man whose name is Zacchaeus. His name means, "righteous one." Actually, he was anything but righteous! He was the top-dog tax-collector ("chief among the publicans" – 19:2) in Jericho, which in and of itself was bad enough. For a Jew to have sold out to the Romans to extract taxes from fellow-Jews was despicable in this culture. They were viewed as ruthless, heart-less, conniving, lying, traitors—and those would have been their good qualities!

And evidently, Zacchaeus had made quite a reputation for himself! (See 19:7) It seems apparent that Zacchaeus was a guy sporting a major "short-man complex," and found he could be "taller," not by beating up bigger guys, but by making them submit to him as he gouged them out of money through their taxes.

But, oh the difference one day can make in a person's life! Just like Zacchaeus, when I lifted my head up off my pillow to begin my day on September 24, 1972, I had no idea what would take place in my life by the time my head would hit the pillow again—but in that one day, I was turned:

- From darkness to light. (Col. 1:13; Acts 16:18a)
- From the power of Satan to the power of God. (II Tim. 2:26; Acts 26:18b)
- From guilt to forgiveness. (Acts 16:18c)
- From serving sin to serving righteousness. (Rom. 6:17-18)
- From separation from God to a relationship with Him. (Eph. 2:1; Gal. 4:5-7)
- From spiritual death to spiritual life. (Eph. 2:1; Rom 8:2)

And in this story, this was that one day that would forever change Zacchaeus' life! He hears word that Jesus is coming to town, and desperately wants to lay his eyes on this One for whom there had been so much hype. He goes out to catch a glimpse, but because of his short stature, he can't see Him. He decides to run ahead and climb a tree so he can at least see Him, and much to his surprise, as Jesus passes under the tree, not only does He see him, and not only does He speak to him, but He invites Himself over to Zacchaeus' house! Can you imagine?

Zacchaeus was stoked! (19:6) He received Jesus into His home as a guest, and in just a matter of minutes, Jesus had become its Master! Zacchaeus acknowledged Christ's lordship, and was saved! (19:9)

Do note in verses 8 and 9, that Jesus wasn't saying that Zacchaeus was saved because of his pledge to give to the poor and to make right the wrong he had done by gouging people of their money. His willingness to do those things

was just the visible PROOF of his salvation. Anyone can talk a big talk about their salvation, but when God has a man's finances, it's usually a pretty good indicator that He has all of him (Matt. 6:21), and visa-versa. In this one afternoon, Jesus caused this "sinner" (19:9) to live up to his name ("righteous one"), as he became a true "son of Abraham" (19:9) by faith. (Rom. 4:12; Gal. 3:7)

It might be interesting to note that in reality, like Zacchaeus, we all have a "short-man complex" that only Jesus can help us overcome: "For all have sinned, and come SHORT of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). In our lost state we tried to make ourselves not appear to be so "short" through our religiousness, our good works, and our external righteousness, but it only made us "shorter." (Rom. 10:3; Isa. 64:6)

The good news about Zacchaeus, is that not only did everybody else know he was a sinner (19:7), but he knew it too, and was willing to deal with it! HE is the only one in the story who received "salvation!" (19:9) There is a strong possibility that the self-righteous, religious crowd who got so upset in verse 7 about Jesus hanging out with Zacchaeus, ultimately went to Hell. That scenario continues to repeat itself right up to this present hour.

A couple of other comments about today's reading:

19:10 – Zacchaeus ran up the road seeking to see Jesus, at the same time Jesus was walking up the road seeking to save Zacchaeus.

19:14-15 – Recognize that we are living right now in the very last hours in that time between verses 14 and 15, between the Master's absence and His promise to return!

19:41-44 – This is only the second time that Jesus wept publicly. (John 11:35) Notice that while the crowd is rejoicing (19:37), Jesus is weeping. Sounds a whole lot like Laodicea.

20:1-47 – Chapter 20 can be broken down by the four questions Jesus asks:

- A question concerning John the Baptist. (20:1-19)
- A question concerning Caesar. (20:20-26)
- A question concerning Moses. (20:27-40)
- A question concerning David. (20:41-44)

21:1-4 – Jesus isn't impressed with the size of our gift, but the size of our sacrifice.

21:5-38 – The remainder of chapter 21 lines up with the things we covered in Matthew 24 and Mark 13.

WEEK 45, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: LUKE 22-24

OVERVIEW:

The wicked plot of the religious leaders to kill Jesus and to contract Judas (22:1-6); Jesus' last Passover (22:7-13); the converting of the Passover meal into His own supper (22:14-28); prayer in the garden (22:39-46); Jesus' arrest (22:47-54); Peter's denial (22:55-62); Jesus is mocked, blasphemed, and beaten (22:63-71); Jesus before Pilate (23:1-7); Jesus before Herod (23:8-10); Jesus returned to Pilate (23:11-24); Pilate releases Jesus to His accusers to be crucified (23:25-49); Jesus' burial (23:50-56); Jesus' resurrection (24:1-12); the ministry of the risen Christ (24:13-45); Jesus' commission (24:46-49); Jesus' ascension (24:50-53).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The ground we will cover in today's reading is ground that we have walked through in both Matthew and Mark's Gospel. Though we have already read it two times in as many weeks, may God use it to minister to our hearts with a fresh sense of wonder and appreciation today. This is the manifestation of God's love for us (I John 4:9), and the revelation of the Gospel (I Cor. 15:1-4). In other words, as far as salvation is concerned, this is the heart of the Bible!

Because we have become at least somewhat familiar with this information, our comments today will be centered in chapter 22:7-20, as the Lord establishes the observance of communion—or what we sometimes refer to as the Lord's Supper.

First of all, keep in mind that this is the PASSOVER meal that our Lord is eating with His disciples. (Luke 22:7, 15) To understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper, then, we must have an understanding of the PASSOVER, because it is actually the BREAD and CUP of the Passover meal that our Lord turns into His OWN Supper.

1. The biblical and historical meaning of the Passover.

- A general understanding of the Passover Meal

The Passover meal was a commemorative feast that reminded the JEWS of what God had done in DELIVERING them out of their bondage in EGYPT.

- The particular circumstances of the first Passover (Exodus 12)

God's people were being held in bondage in the dominant world power, EGYPT—being held captive by the will of its wicked king, PHARAOH. Day after day they labored as SLAVES under the domination of the taskmaster's whip, as they trudged out their existence in EGYPT. God delivered them from Egypt by a series of plagues, the last of which was the curse of death upon the FIRSTBORN. The only way they could escape the death of the firstborn in their house was to kill a spotless lamb, and APPLY its BLOOD to the top beam and the two side posts of the door. When the angel of death passed through the city to execute judgment, He would "pass over" every house to which the blood of the lamb had been applied. God instituted the "passover" meal on that night, and commanded them to celebrate it each year so they would be continuously put in REMEMBRANCE of His delivering power that was manifest in bringing them out of the bondage of Egypt by the blood of the Lamb.

- The "big picture" of the Passover

We, too, were being held in bondage in the course of this WORLD (i.e. Egypt), being held captive by the will of its wicked king, SATAN. (Ephesians 2:2; II Timothy 2:26) Day after day, we labored as SLAVES under the domination of the taskmaster of SIN, as we trudged out our existence in the course of this WORLD. (Romans 6:14; Gal. 1:4) God delivered us from the curse of death upon our FIRST BIRTH,

because we applied the BLOOD of the true "Passover Lamb," the Lord Jesus Christ, to our lives. (1 Cor. 5:7) God instituted a meal that He has commanded us to observe so we will be continuously put in REMEMBRANCE of His delivering power that was manifest in bringing us out of the bondage of this world and sin through the BLOOD of the spotless lamb of God on the cross. (Luke 22:7-20; Matthew 26:17- 28)

2. The biblical and historical understanding of the Lord's Supper.
 - The transformation of the bread and the cup of the Passover.
 - A new meaning of the bread.

"And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19)
 - A new meaning of the cup.

"Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." (Luke 22:20)

In other words, "From now on, don't go back to the picture; go back to the reality."
 - The meaning of "eating the bread" and "drinking the cup."
 - There are two basic things that a person needs to come to grips with in order to be saved...

#1– Who Christ is. (i.e. We must believe that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh.)

#2– What Christ did. (i.e. We must believe that Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross to atone for man's sin.)
 - Jesus' metaphor of "eating the bread" and "drinking the cup" in John 6.

The religious leaders are appalled by Jesus' claim to be God. Jesus is trying to get them to understand, that "If you never come to grips with who I am, and what I have come to do, you will never receive eternal life."
 - The connection of "eating the bread" and "drinking the cup" in the Lord's Supper. We are brought back to the very two things that saved us...

#1– That God opened our eyes to understand that Jesus Christ is, in fact, God in a human body.

#2– That we placed our faith in what Jesus Christ, as God, did through the shedding of His blood for the remission of our sin.

WEEK 45, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: JOHN 1-4

OVERVIEW:

Christ is the Word (1:1-3, 14); Christ is the Light (1:4- 13); Christ is the Son of God (1:15-18), 30-34, 49); Christ is the Messiah (1:19-28, 35-42); Christ is the Lamb of God (1:29, 35-36); Christ is the King of Israel (1:43-49); Christ is the Son of Man (1:50- 51); Christ and the disciples (1:9-2:12); Christ and the Jews (2:13- 3:36); Christ and the Samaritans (4:1-54).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

We have come to the fourth and final of the Gospels, the Gospel of John. One of the obvious questions that surfaces in every generation of believers is, why are there four Gospels and not just one? Certainly, the easiest answer is the simple fact that God wanted it that way! That's good enough for me, but perhaps we can site three very basic reasons why God wanted it that way:

1. The Practical Reason.

If you were a police officer investigating an accident at an intersection and had found four people who had witnessed the accident from the four different corners of the scene, it would provide you with all the information you would need to prove conclusively what had actually taken place. The four Gospel accounts allow us to do the same.

2. The Presentational Reason.

As we have seen, each Gospel is written to a particular audience with a very particular way of presenting who Jesus Christ actually is. We saw that Matthew was written to the Jews to present Jesus Christ as the King of the Jews. Mark was written to the Gentiles (perhaps more specifically, the Romans) to present Jesus Christ as the Servant of the Lord. Luke was written to the Greeks to present Jesus Christ as the Son of Man. And John is written to the world to present Jesus Christ as the Son of God. It is interesting to note that the word "world" is found 59 times in this Book (almost one-fourth of the times it is found in the entire Bible!). John wants every tribe, tongue, people and nation of the world to hear and understand that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, God in human flesh, and is the source and meaning of life. In fact, when John comes to the end of his Gospel he declares that very calculated two-fold purpose: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye MIGHT BELIEVE that Jesus is the Christ (i.e. the "anointed," the Messiah), the Son of God (i.e. God in a human body); and that believing ye MIGHT HAVE LIFE through his name." (20:30-31)

In presenting this Gospel to the world, keep in mind that the greatest barrier to "world communication" is not geography... it's not money... it's not even politics (the world is quickly moving to a one-world government!). The greatest barrier has always been and is LANGUAGE! So take just a second to look up these verses to see what this Gospel that seeks to present Christ to the world is so intent on: 1:38, 41, 42; 5:2; 9:7; 19:19-20. John wants every culture in the world to understand exactly what is being said, so they will BELIEVE Jesus Christ is God, and RECEIVE the life He offers.

3. The Peripheral Reason.

It is quite interesting to note what God reveals in scripture that are on the four corners of His throne. In Revelation 4:6-7, John writes, "And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a LION, and the second beast like a CALF, and the third beast had a face as a MAN, and the fourth beast was like a flying EAGLE."

The connection of the four beasts of Revelation to the four Gospels seems more than apparent by the likeness of each beast to the content of each gospel, right down to the very order in which they are listed.

- 1st Beast: Like a LION.
As Matthew's purpose was to reveal Christ as the King of the Jews, He is presented as the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5).
- 2nd Beast: Like a CALF.
As Mark's purpose was to reveal Christ as the Servant of the Lord, He is presented as the One who **MINISTERS** in service and sacrifice.
- 3rd Beast: Like a MAN. As Luke's purpose was to reveal Christ as the Son of Man, He is presented as the perfect Man.
- 4th Beast: Like an EAGLE.
As John's purpose was to reveal Christ as the Son of God, He is presented as the Word who descended from heaven like an eagle and was made flesh.

In keeping your bearings in the Gospel of John, it is important to realize that this Gospel is centered around the Passover Feasts. John takes us through three Passovers in this Book, which ultimately culminate with the crucifixion.

1. John 1:1-2:13 is the beginning of Christ's ministry up to the first Passover recorded in John's account.
2. John 2:14-5:1 takes us up to the second Passover Feast.
3. John 5:2-6:4 takes us up "nigh" (near) to the third Passover to the actual record of Jesus eating the Passover Feast with His disciples in 13:1-2, and we move into the night before His crucifixion.

Why is everything built around the Passover? Well, keep in mind the things we saw in yesterday's comments from Luke 22... Jesus is none other than the fulfillment of the Passover Lamb! (1 Cor. 5:7) That's why John the Baptist said what he said concerning Christ in today's reading: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (1:29) The Passover was the commemoration of the most significant even in Jewish history: God's deliverance from the slavery and oppression in Egypt under Pharaoh, its wicked king. And how were they delivered? Through the blood of a spotless lamb! In this Gospel, John takes us to the final Passover, and the shedding of the blood of THE spotless LAMB of God! This one-time historical event has been delivering people from the slavery of this world (Egypt – Eph 2:2) and its wicked king (Satan- 2 Tim. 2:26) for nearly 2000 years!

May God use each of us to declare what John the Baptist declared in 1:29 to the lost people in our world today!

WEEK 45, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: JOHN 5-7

OVERVIEW:

Christ and the Jewish leaders (5:1-47); Christ and the multitudes (6:1- 71); the conflict over Moses (7:1-8:11).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we saw in yesterday's comments, John clearly identifies in chapter 20, verse 30 and 31, that the purpose of this Gospel was to reveal the signs Christ gave during His earthly ministry to prove His deity, so that the gift of life—both eternal and abundant (John 10:10)—can be ours.

It is important to know that the first three Gospels have been referred to historically as the "Synoptic Gospels." The word "synoptic" comes from a Greek word meaning "to see together." These three Books, as we have seen, cover the same basic material. Over 90 percent of the material covered in John's Gospel, however, is not covered in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. While these first three Gospels deal primarily with the "events" in the life of Christ, John deals primarily with the "meaning" of these events. Perhaps the clearest example is the feeding of the 5000. While all four gospels record the event, only John follows the miracle with the sermon of Christ being the "Bread of Life" (John 6), which provides the explanation of the miracle.

But not only does John emphasize the MEANING of the events in the life of Christ, He also emphasizes the PERSON of Christ. John records key sermons that Jesus preached in which He identified WHO He is, and WHAT He came to the earth to do. It is significant that in John's coverage of these sermons, John records the seven "I AM" declarations of Christ. "I AM" is significant in the fact that it was the name Jehovah God used to reveal who He was to Moses in Exodus 3:14. As we have noted on previous occasions, seven in the Bible is the number of "perfection" and/or "completion." Remember, John's purpose in this Gospel is to reveal that Christ is "perfectly" and "completely" God! (20:30-31)

1. I AM the Bread of Life.(6:35,41,48,51)
2. I AM the Light of the World.(8:12;9:5)
3. I AM the Door of the Sheep.(10:7,9)
4. I AM the Good Shepherd. (10:11, 14)
5. I AM the Resurrection and the Life. (11:25)
6. I AM the Way, the Truth, the Life. (14:6)
7. I AM the True Vine.(15:1,5)

Be sure to note that there are other occasions in John's Gospel when Jesus refers to Himself as the "I Am" in reference to His deity (4:26; 8:28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8), but the seven listed above are unique in that they are not only descriptive of His deity, but of how He as God provides life. (20:30-31)

Another very distinct, unique and interesting quality of John's Gospel is that of the many miracles Christ performed, John chose (under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, of course) to record seven. And in keeping with his purpose in everything that he recorded in this Gospel (20:31), these seven were specifically chosen to reveal that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." Not only, however, were these miracles specifically chosen, but they are revealed in a very specific order because they form a "perfect" and "complete" picture of salvation.

- The first three show the **MEANS** of salvation:
 1. Water into wine. (2:1-11) – Salvation is by the WORD of GOD.

2. Healing the nobleman's son. (4:46-54) – Salvation is by FAITH.
3. Healing the paralyzed man. (5:1-9) – Salvation is by GRACE.
- The fourth miracle stands by itself to teach that dedicated disciples must give the Bread of Life to lost sinners.
4. Feeding the 5000. (6:1-14) – Salvation is brought to the world by HUMAN MEANS.
- The last three show the RESULTS of salvation:
 5. Calming the storm. (6:15-21) – Salvation brings PEACE.
 6. Healing the blind man. (9:1-7) – Salvation brings LIGHT.
 7. Raising of Lazarus. (11:38-45) – Salvation brings LIFE.

It is also significant to note that each of these seven miracles actually introduce the discourse that followed. For example: the discourse with Nicodemus was the direct result of the miracles that Nicodemus had witnessed. (3:2) The healing of the paralyzed man (5:1-9) led to the discourse in 5:10-47. The feeding of the 5000 was the backdrop of the discourse concerning the Bread of Life in 6:1-59. The healing of the blind man in 9:34 that led to him being cast out is what led to the discourse concerning Christ being the Good Shepherd Who never casts out anyone. (10:1-41)

As we did for each of the other gospels, the following will provide an overall analysis of the Gospel of John...

1. Information About The Author.

- His name: John.
- His name means "Jehovah." (The Lord) is a gracious giver."
- He is referred to in scripture as the disciple whom Jesus loves. (Jn. 21:20-24)
- His father's name is Zebedee. (Mt. 4:21)
- He has a brother named James. (Mt. 4:21)
- He was intolerant of others. (Lk. 9:49-56)
- He is one of the two "sons of thunder." (Mk. 3:17)
- His initial ministry was limited to Jews. (Gal. 2:9)
- He was exiled to an island called Patmos. (Rev. 1:9)
- He also wrote the Books of 1,2 and 3 John, and Revelation.

2. Facts About This Gospel.

- Approximate date of writing: 85-90 A.D.
- Written from Ephesus
- Dates of recorded events: 26 A.D. – 33 A.D.
- Theme: Deity of Christ
- Christ is seen as the Son of God
- Key verse: John 20:31
- Key word: Believe (99 times)
- Chapters: 21
- Verses: 879
- Words: 19,973

3. Features Of This Gospel.

- This is the Gospel that identifies Christ as the Son of God more than any other.
- This is the Gospel that has the least number of events recorded.
- This Gospel contains 15 fulfilled prophecies

4. Simple Outline Of This Gospel—Three Witnesses:

- Witness #1 - The Witness of Jesus' Words and Works. (Chapters 1-12)
- Witness #2 - The Witness to His Witnesses. (Chapters 13-17)
- Witness #3 - The Witness to the World. (Chapters 18-21)

WEEK 45, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: JOHN 8-10

OVERVIEW:

The conflict over Moses (7:1-8:11); the conflict over Abraham (8:12- 59); the conflict over Christ's Sonship (9:1-10:42).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we continue seeking to get our bearings in John's Gospel, and seeing how it relates to the other Gospel accounts, there is plenty to glean just by observing the introductory genealogy in each of the Books.

Because Matthew presents Christ as the King of the Jews, Christ's genealogy in this Gospel runs through David, back to Abraham. (Matt. 1:1)

Because Mark presents Christ as the Servant of the Lord, the significant thing about Mark's genealogy is that there is none! A servant's genealogy is insignificant! His significance is determined by what he does (i.e. His work).

Because Luke presents Christ as the Son of Man, His genealogy is traced in his Gospel through His human mother back to the first man.

And because John presents Christ as the Son of God, Christ's genealogy in this Gospel takes us back to the very "beginning" (John 1:1; Gen. 1:1), to show Christ's deity (that He is, in fact, God and very God)—and the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ has always eternally existed in the Godhead. There has never been a time that Christ didn't exist, and there has never been a time that He wasn't God and completely co-equal with the Father. (Heb. 1:8; Phil. 2:6)

Today's reading is absolutely jam-packed with irrefutable biblical evidence that Jesus Christ is God. One of the key arguments Jehovah's False Witnesses assert is that Jesus never actually claimed to be God. All I can say, is how do you spell "BLIND"?!!! (1 Cor. 4:4)

Familiarize yourself with John 8:12-57 before we take just a second to comment on Jesus' statement in verse 58: "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."

Do you understand what is actually happening here? Jesus was declaring to the Pharisees (and to the whole world!) that He is God, using the same name for HIMSELF that Jehovah Himself used when He revealed HIMSELF to Moses in Exodus 3:14! Jesus is claiming here that He is none other than the Great "I AM"!!! Listen, there is absolutely nothing that Jesus could have said that would have been a stronger claim of deity than that! And notice that Jesus didn't say, "Before Abraham was, I WAS." Jesus is not simply claiming here that He existed before His physical birth. He uses the term "I AM" to show that He was not only "A god," but "THE God"... "JEHOVAH GOD!!!"

And be it known, that this is not simply "my interpretation," or "one way of interpreting the meaning of the verse!" That this verse is specifically teaching that Christ is, in fact, Jehovah God is made abundantly clear by the response of the Pharisees in the very next verse (verse 59)! They understood exactly what Jesus was claiming! That's why they "took up stones to cast at him." Stoning, according to Leviticus 24:16, was the penalty for blasphemy! They wanted to stone Him because He claimed to be God!

The same exact thing happens in chapter 10, verses 22-33. Jesus makes His absolute claim of deity in verse 30 (again, how totally ludicrous to say that Jesus never claimed to be God!), stating, "I and my Father are one." The

Jehovah's False Witnesses can claim all they want that Jesus' statement here doesn't mean that He was claiming deity, but the passage teaches otherwise! Again, those who were listening to

Jesus in John 10 understood exactly what Jesus meant by what He said, evidenced by their reaction to it! In verse 31, they "took up stones again to stone him," because that was the Old Testament penalty for blasphemy! Jesus even forced them to identify exactly why they were responding in such a manner so there would never ever be a question about His claim: "Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God!" (10:32-33)

There is no doubt about it, folks, Jesus Christ IS God... and clearly CLAIMED to be God!

WEEK 45, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: JOHN 11-14

OVERVIEW:

The raising of Lazarus (11:1-46); the Pharisees' plot to kill Jesus (11:47-57); Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet (12:1-11); the triumphal entry (12:12-19); Jesus' answer to the Greeks (12:20-50); Jesus washes the disciples' feet (13:1-17); Jesus foretells His betrayal, His death, and His second coming (13:18-14:14); Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit (14:15-31).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As has been mentioned, and as you have no doubt already noticed, the Gospel of John is the most unique of all of the Gospels. It is unique for numerous reasons, but perhaps the main reason for its uniqueness has not yet been mentioned: its unique author. As far as Jesus' disciples are concerned, John is in a category all to himself. John is, without a doubt, the greatest picture or illustration of what a Christian should be in the entire New Testament. As Jesus begins His ministry and calls the Twelve, what soon becomes evident is that out of all the disciples, John is going to be:

A UNIQUE FOLLOWER.

As Jesus calls the Twelve, it is interesting to observe that in a loose sense, they actually picture and represent all of Christianity. There are things that were true about that group that have been true of every group of believers who have ever gathered together.

You see, of the Twelve, there was one that made the same claim as all of the others. He looked like a Christian. He knew how to speak Christianese. He knew how to present himself as a Christian. The only problem was that he had never genuinely been saved. Of course, that was Judas. Perhaps that same ratio exists in the church today. Maybe one out of twelve have a "profession" of salvation, but no real "possession."

Then, of the rest of the eleven, there were eight. And these guys were saved, and just really "good folk." They attended the meetings of the assembly. They sang the songs; they gave their offerings, and were a part of the activities. But that's about as far as it went. They were just kind of satisfied with being "average." I think most pastors would tell you that just like the disciples, that description fits about two-thirds (8 out of 12) of their congregation.

But then there were the three. There were three of the disciples that couldn't be satisfied with the status quo. There were three who had a more intimate relationship with the Lord than all of the others. Of course, they were Peter, James and John. They witnessed greater miracles than the others. (Matt. 17:1; Luke 9:28; Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51) The Lord revealed to them what He revealed to no one else. (Mark 13:3) He shared more of His heart with them than He did the others. (Mark 14:32-34) All the way throughout Jesus' ministry, they were just more in tune with the Lord. There is that same 25% in churches today. While it seems others are just passively walking through life, these folks are walking with their eyes fixed on things which cannot be seen. (II Cor. 4:18) They walk up mountains with the Lord, and He reveals to them His glory. (Matt. 17:1-8) They just go further in their walk than everyone else. (Mark 14:32-33)

And yet, even out of those three, there's that one that goes even further! And that, of course, was John. John is an incredible picture of somebody who goes all the way with Christ. At the crucifixion, Judas had already done his thing. James is gone. Peter is following afar off. (Luke 22:54) All of the disciples have scattered. (John 16:32) All except one. You know where you find John at the crucifixion? He's right where He's supposed to be! He's at the

cross, at the feet of Jesus! (John 19:26) Man, what a unique follower! He's the only one who followed Jesus all the way. Are you that one out of twelve?

And secondly, God has for this "unique follower,"

A UNIQUE TITLE.

On six different occasions when the Bible is making reference to John, when it could have very easily simply said "John," the Holy Spirit inspired it to be written, the "disciple whom Jesus loved." It's a phrase not used of any of the other disciples. Didn't Jesus love them? Certainly He did. But Jesus had a very special love for John. And do you know why Jesus had such a special love for John? It was because John had a very special love for Jesus! John is a great example of what it is to love Jesus with all of your heart. And that love for Jesus gave John something else:

A UNIQUE CONFIDENCE.

In the upper room with His disciples when Jesus revealed that one of the Twelve would betray Him, Matthew 26:22 says they "began every one of them to say unto him, Lord is it I?" All of them except John. John 13:25 says that John's question was, "Lord, who is it?" John may not have had enough spiritual discernment to figure out which one would betray Him, but there was one thing he knew for sure. It wasn't going to be him!

But there's at least one other thing that makes John more unique than perhaps any other person in the Bible, and that is that John had:

A UNIQUE PRIVILEGE.

In fact, John had the privilege of all privileges! John 13:25 says that in the upper room the night before Jesus was crucified, he had the unbelievable privilege of laying his head on "Jesus' breast." And do you realize Whose breast this actually is? It is God in human flesh! Here is John with his head on Jesus' breast, as he has the unique privilege of listening to the very heartbeat of God!

That may sound like an over-spiritualization, or you may think it is dramatizing the point, and yet the fact is, the problem we face in Christianity today is that we don't have our head on "Jesus' breast!" And because we don't, we don't hear the heartbeat of God!

Most Christians are so in love with themselves (II Tim. 3:2), they hear and know their own heartbeat. Most Christians are so preoccupied with people's opinion of them, they definitely hear and know the heartbeat of others (I Cor. 4:3). Most Christians are so engulfed in the world and enamored with the things of this world, they hear and know the heartbeat of the world. But realize today, that the Book you hold in your own two hands today, is God's heartbeat! (John 1:1, 14) Through it, lay your head on Jesus' breast, and listen today with John (John 13:25), to the very heartbeat of God!

WEEK 46, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: JOHN 15-19

OVERVIEW:

Jesus teaches about abiding in Him (15:1-11); Jesus teaches about loving one another (15:12-17); Jesus warns about persecution (15:18-16:7); Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit (16:8-33); Jesus' prayer of intercession (17:1-26); Jesus' betrayal and arrest (18:1-14); Peter's denial (18:15-18); Jesus before the high priest (18:19-24); Peter's second and third denial (18:25-27); Jesus before Pilate (18:28-38); Barabbas is released (18:39-40); Christ's crucifixion (19:1-37); Christ's burial (19:38-42).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

We enter into the whole arena of our Lord's betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion today for the fourth time in almost as many weeks. One of the most important things to keep in your mind as you read about His incredible sacrifice is something Jesus said back in chapter 10, verses 17 and 18. Jesus said, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I LAY DOWN MY LIFE, that I might take it again. NO MAN TAKETH IT FROM ME, but I LAY IT DOWN OF MYSELF. I have power to LAY IT DOWN, and I have power to take it again." The reason these two verses are so significant is that they help us to interpret what is really taking place as Jesus is being crucified. Though it appears that He is the victim, nothing could be further from the truth! Jesus was never a victim to anybody! The fact is, Jesus died, not because men killed Him, because they couldn't! There was no way that Jesus could have died had He not willed to die.

For centuries people have been arguing about who killed Jesus. The Jewish leaders, of course, are the primary targets of the blame, and rightly so, because it was their plot, and their false charges that actually forced the issue. Others choose to blame the Romans, and they, too, deserve a portion of the blame, because they were the ones who set aside what was normal justice to appease an angry mob, and they knowingly went ahead and executed an innocent man.

But if you really want to get to the bottom line on who bears the responsibility for Christ's death, all you have to do is listen to Peter in Acts 2:23: "Him, (that is, Christ) being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of GOD, ye have taken (the Jews), and by wicked hands (the Romans) have crucified and slain."

Who was it that was responsible for the death of Christ? It was neither the Jews nor the Romans, though they certainly bear the guilt for the actual execution and sin that was involved. The ultimate responsibility, however, lies with God! It was God who destined it. It was God that planned it. And Jesus, in an act of submissive obedience, simply carried out the eternal plan. (Rev. 13:8) But don't ever lose sight of the fact that HE LAID DOWN HIS LIFE! John 19:30 says, "When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and HE BOWED HIS HEAD, AND GAVE(!!!) UP THE GHOST." Nobody TOOK it. He GAVE it! He yielded His life. And just as surely as He laid down His life, He TOOK IT AGAIN!

Allow me to call to your attention to a few places in today's reading where Jesus is demonstrating the fact that HE is in control:

19:16 – "Then delivered he (Pilate) him (Christ) therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and LED him away."

It seems a minor thing to say "they led him away," but it isn't minor. You see, Jesus didn't have to be driven, He went willingly. He followed them to the cross. And, of course, that's just how the prophet Isaiah said it would happen. Isaiah 53:7 says, "He is BROUGHT AS A LAMB to the slaughter." Unlike cattle which are DRIVEN, sheep are LED.

19:17a – “And he BEARING HIS CROSS...”

Notice, Jesus carried His own cross. Why is this happening? Because it, too, is exactly how God prophesied that it would unfold in a prophetic type in the Old Testament. Genesis 22:6 is a prophetic type rather than a prophetic statement as in Isaiah 53:7 above. In Genesis 22:6, Isaac is a picture of Christ, and the verse says, “And Abraham took the WOOD of the burnt OFFERING, and LAID IT UPON ISAAC HIS SON.” So, Isaac went up to Mt. Moriah, carrying the wood that was to be used for his own execution. And so, Jesus, controlling every detail of what is taking place in John 19, carries His own “wood,” in a perfect fulfillment of what Isaac pictured prophetically.

19:17b – “And he bearing his cross WENT FORTH...”

“Went forth” means that He was led outside the city walls. Why did that happen? Because that was Roman law. Roman law said that no one could be crucified inside the city. And so they had a place outside the city “called the place of a skull” (19:17c), and it was called that because from a distance the mountainside resembled a skull. Jesus was taken there because it was the normal place for crucifixions. But, once again, long before Rome built that law into its books, way back in the Book of Exodus when God instituted the offering for sin He said, “But the flesh of the bullock and his skin, and his dung, shalt thou burn with fire WITHOUT (i.e. OUTSIDE) the camp: it is a sin offering.” (Ex. 29:14) And Jesus, in perfect fulfillment of the picture of the sin offering in the Old Testament, was sacrificed outside the city. The Romans had no idea about that when they made their laws, but they made that law because God knew that one day His Son was coming to fulfill the picture of Exodus 22:6.

19:18a – “they CRUCIFIED Him.”

This is another exact fulfillment—and one that certainly couldn't have been anticipated! Because you see, the Jews didn't crucify people. They stoned people. But Christ was to be crucified. That was a Roman way to die. And once again, it fulfills Numbers 21:6-9, which says that when Israel was bitten by snakes, they were to make a serpent and lift it up on a rod, and anybody who looked upon it would be healed. Jesus said in John 3:14 – “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.” And that's exactly how it happened. In His crucifixion, Jesus was lifted up on a cross. That kind of death was unheard of by the Jews in the Old Testament, but that's how prophecy said it would happen, so it did.

19:18b – “they crucified him, and TWO OTHER WITH HIM, ON EITHER SIDE ONE, AND JESUS IN THE MIDST (i.e. middle).”

Is it significant that He died with criminals? Absolutely! Isaiah 53:12 says, “He was numbered with the transgressors.”

And we could continue like this through this entire passage! It is simply one fulfilled prophecy after another. Jesus is ordering every detail of His own execution to fulfill the plan that God Himself laid down in eternity. He was in control of every single detail that was unfolding.

Finally, John 19:28 says, “After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst.”

Why did He say, “I thirst?” Was it because He was thirsty? I'm sure He was! But that's not why He said it. He said it, because He knew that every single other Old Testament prophecy concerning His death had been fulfilled except that one. Only one prophecy remained unfilled. Psalm 69:21 says about Him in His death, “In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” So, in John 19:28, when Jesus says, “I thirst,” what He's actually doing is reaching back to grab that one unfulfilled prophecy—so that His death could be “according to the Scriptures.” Because you see, according to I Corinthians 15:3, for the gospel to actually be the gospel that has the power to save us, it required that every detail prophesied in the Old Testament concerning Christ's death be fulfilled to the absolute letter! John 19:30 says, “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished.” In other words, “Every prophecy has now been fulfilled. I can go ahead and die now.” And verse 30 goes on to say, “And he bowed his head (no slump to the

side, He bowed it!) and gave up the ghost." How did He die? Did he bleed to death? Did He die of exposure? Did He have a heart attack? Did He suffocate? No. He died because He willed Himself dead. He GAVE His life!

WEEK 46, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: JOHN 20-21

OVERVIEW:

Christ's resurrection (20:1-10); Christ's post-resurrection appearances to Mary and to His disciples (20:11-31); Jesus' reinstatement and restoration of Peter (21:1-17); Jesus' final instructions to His disciples (21:18-25).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

By the time we move into John 21 in today's reading, Jesus has already risen from the dead. (John 20) He has made numerous appearances, two of them to His disciples. But at this point, the disciples are in danger of drifting back into their old way of life. (21:3) They had spent three years with the Lord, but all of that is pretty foggy right now. Things didn't really go like they had planned. They've gone from disillusionment to despair. Sure, there was certainly a tremendous rejuvenation in their hearts to realize that Jesus had risen from the dead, but at this point, the disciples still hadn't quite pieced the whole thing together.

Things were different now. For three years they had walked with the Lord and talked with Him; they were always together. Now He appears and disappears without any notice. It's just different. And on top of that, they're all bearing the guilt of the fact that they had forsaken the Lord. All of them but John scattered when Jesus needed them most.

And when you come to the end of chapter 20 in today's reading, the main narrative ends with the great climax of Thomas' confession of faith in verse 28 as he says to Jesus, "My Lord and my God."

Then, John gives an explanation of his purpose in writing the book in verses 30 and 31, saying "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these 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," and it's a beautiful conclusion to the whole thing. And if you couldn't see the next chapter just below these verses in your Bible, you'd think that the Book had ended with verse 31 of chapter 20.

But that's not the end! There are still some extremely important things the Holy Spirit wants us to know about Peter's situation. John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, doesn't want his Gospel to end without telling his readers that Peter had been fully restored and reinstated. You see, without chapter 21, there would have been a major question in all of our minds about whether a person who has blown it like Peter had, could be restored in his relationship with the Lord. Because Peter hadn't just turned his back on the Lord as had the other disciples; he had actually denied Him on three different occasions! I mean, how could someone who had done something like that still be entrusted with the responsibility of shepherding the flock of Jesus Christ? Again, without chapter 21, the question would remain unanswered.

Also, were it not for chapter 21, it would be a mystery in all of our minds, why in the world Peter is so prominent in the first 12 chapters of the next Book of the Bible, the Book of Acts. I mean, how does a guy go from completely denying the Lord when he's 50 feet away from Him, to the boldness exemplified on the Day of Pentecost just seven weeks later, when he looks out on the religious leaders of Israel, and all the people of Judea and Jerusalem, and faced them with the fact that they had taken God's own Son, the Lord of glory, and by their wicked hands, had slain Him! Those are some pretty strong words! How do you go from being a coward, to having that kind of courage? What takes place in chapter 21 is the missing link.

And then, there's at least one other reason for chapter 21. When you come to the end of chapter 20, the last of the disciples has come to genuine faith. That, of course, was "Doubting Thomas." They had all been convinced of the

resurrection, and that, of course, was wonderful—but now what? What were they going to do about it? And chapter 21 is Jesus' call for action.

A few other things to grab a hold of as you make your way through chapter 21:

21:3 – Perhaps we could paraphrase, “Well, I’ll tell you what fellas, I may not be a great preacher or evangelist, but there is one thing I do know how to do, and I’m gonna do that! I’m goin’ fishin!’ Come on boys, let me show ya how it’s done!” Notice, they didn’t even get a bite. The one thing Peter thought he could do, he couldn’t do anymore (John 15:5), because God had put His hand on his life and was in control. Learn the lesson from Peter.

21:15-17 – No matter how our love has failed, there is restoration! Perhaps that’s the message God wants you to receive today... there IS restoration! And notice in this passage, the restoration was initiated by the Lord! He could have said, “You know what Peter, you’re a chump! You talk a big talk, but you can’t be counted on to do anything! I gave you three years of my life, and I can’t even get you to follow one simple command. Just forget it, man!” But that’s not the way it was at all. Jesus initiated the restoration, and provided the one who had denied Him three times, the opportunity to affirm his love for Him... three times!

21:17 – After the third time Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, Peter appeals to the doctrine of omniscience. He says, “Lord, thou knowest all things.” In other words, “Lord, you’re going to have to read my heart, because I know my love for you isn’t obvious by my life.” The doctrine of omniscience is a tremendous thing. The fact is, if God weren’t omniscient, there would be a lot of times God wouldn’t know that we love Him, because like Peter, it isn’t always obvious from our lives. Sometimes, we too, have to ask Jesus to look on the inside, at what is in our hearts.

21:15-17 – Saying, “Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep,” was Jesus’ way of saying, “I forgive you, Peter. I still believe in you, Peter. I still think you’re the right man for the job.”

The things revealed in chapter 21 of John’s Gospel were a turning point in Peter’s life. The things that took place seven weeks later on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 are the proof of that. May God use this chapter to be a turning point in our lives today as well!

WEEK 46, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: ACTS 1-4

OVERVIEW:

The messengers of the kingdom prepared (chapter 1); the offer of the kingdom of heaven to the Nation of Israel (chapter 2); a second offer of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Nation of Israel (chapters 3 and 4).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

- Author: Luke, the physician (Col. 4:14); also the author of the Gospel of Luke (compare Acts 1:1 with Luke 1:1-4).
- Approximate date of writing: 59-65 AD
- Dates of the recorded events: 33-62 AD
- Theme: God's plan for Israel postponed and the revelation of the Church.
- Christ is seen as our Great High Priest ministering in the heavens. (Hebrews 4:14-16) * Key verses: Acts 1:6, 7
- Key chapters: 7-13
- Chapters: 28
- Verses: 1,007
- Words: 24,250

As we discussed in our introduction to the Book of Matthew, there are four Books of the Bible where you can lose your way if you don't keep your compass pointed toward the "ancient landmark" of the Nation of Israel. (Prov. 22:28; 23:10) They are Matthew, Acts, Hebrews and James. It's not difficult to navigate your way through the Book of Acts if you keep the following "trail markers" in mind.

Trail Marker #1:

This Book is entitled, "The Acts of the Apostles." The title is NOT, "The Doctrine (or Teaching) of the Apostles." And that's very significant! The Book of "ACTS" is the historical record of the "ACTIONS" of the Apostles. Simply stated, it's the story of what happened through the continued ministry of Jesus through the Apostles. (Acts 1:1)

Trail Marker #2:

The key verses of the Book are Acts 1:6 and 7.

"..[the Apostles] asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And [Jesus] said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."

The Apostles' minds in verse 6 are focused on one thing and one thing only: the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His kingdom on earth. Remember, Jesus had told them they'd be sitting on 12 thrones with Him in the kingdom! (Matt. 19:28) This was, obviously, a big deal to them! Jesus' answer to them concerning the timing for the establishment of the Kingdom in verse 7, however, is rather vague. Basically, what He tells them is, "It depends!"

You see, at this point in the Book of Acts and in the plan of God, the literal, earthly kingdom (the "Kingdom of Heaven") and the King of that kingdom—Jesus Christ, the Messiah—are still being offered to the Nation of Israel. When Jesus answered the Apostles' question in verse 7, it remained to be seen what Israel would do with their final offer. However, by the time Paul writes his first letter to the Thessalonians in 54 AD, it is clear that the question had been answered. If we compare Acts 1:7 where Jesus says "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons," with 1 Thess. 5:1 and 2 where Paul says, "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye... know perfectly"—obviously, a

transition has been made! It's gone from, "It's not for you to know," to "You know perfectly!" As we will see, the Apostles' question was actually answered in Acts 7 after the nation of Israel rejected the offer of the kingdom for the third time. This brings us to our third trail marker.

Trail Marker #3:

Acts is a transitional book. One thing we will observe as we make our way through this Book is that the most CONSISTENT thing about the Book of Acts is its INCONSISTENCY! God does one thing in one place, and does something completely different in another place. This is very simply because God is making key transitions for key purposes throughout this entire Book. This Book is a bridge that carries us from one dispensation into a new dispensation, the Church Age. We are currently living in the Church Age. Acts is the record of God's transition from accomplishing His plan through the Nation of Israel to accomplishing His plan through the Church. God's change in plans is made obvious through seven transitions and three key events in the Book of Acts.

- **Transition #1:** From the ministry of Jesus Christ to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. (1:2)
- **Transition #2:** From "the Twelve" being referred to as "disciples" to "apostles." (1:2)
 - Key Event #1: The Nation of Israel's final rejection of the Kingdom of Heaven. (Acts 7)
- **Transition #3:** From the Nation of Israel to the Samaritans—a race of half Jew and half Gentile. (8:1-5)
- **Transition #4:** From the Nation of Israel to the Church—a group composed of Jews and Gentiles. (8:26-11:18)
- **Transition #5:** From the preaching of the "Kingdom of Heaven"—the literal earthly kingdom offered to the nation of Israel... to the preaching of the "Kingdom of God"—the unseen spiritual kingdom inside individual believers. (8:12)
 - Key Event #2: The salvation of the Gentile, Cornelius, and the determination by the Apostles that God is no longer dealing exclusively with the Jews, but has now taken salvation to the Gentiles. (11:18)
 - Key Event #3: The execution of the Apostle James, and the decision not to replace him, and Peter's departure to Caesarea. (12:1, 2, 19)
- **Transition #6:** From Peter, the Apostle to the Jews... to Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. (9:1- 13:1)
- **Transition #7:** From God's base of operations being in Jerusalem to it being in Antioch. (11:26 – 13:1)

It's important to understand that the transition from Israel to the Church and the Church Age were "mysteries," or truths that were hidden from the twelve Apostles. (see Rom. 11:25; Eph. 3:1- 12; 2:11-22) The Twelve believed that God dealt exclusively with the Nation of Israel (Matt. 10:5-7), and in their ethnocentric opinions, the Gentiles were pagan heathens unworthy to receive anything from God. (Acts 11:1-3) The Apostles, however, thought they were going to find themselves in the millennial reign of Christ, but actually found themselves in the Church Age. Needless to say, their journey was full of surprises!

Trail Marker #4:

Keep in mind as we're making our way through these key transitions and events in the Book of Acts, that the Jews require a sign. God makes this explicitly clear in I Cor. 1:22, saying, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." The signs and wonders done by Jesus and the Apostles were designed to prove to Israel that the message and the messengers were sent by God. (Heb. 2:3-4) Miraculous healings and speaking in tongues were signs for the Nation of Israel. I Cor. 14:22 says, "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not." Tongues were a sign given to unbelieving Jews—and every time tongues occur in the Bible

(which, by the way, is only three times—Acts 2, 10, 19), an unbelieving Jew is present to witness the sign. The reason that Apostolic healings and speaking in tongues do not occur today is because God has postponed His dealings with Israel. Romans 11:25 makes this very clear: “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 is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.” God has temporarily blinded Israel and is currently working exclusively through the Church.

With these four trail markers at the forefront of our minds, let’s take a look at some highlights in chapters 1-4.

Acts 2—

This chapter is a vortex of doctrinal error in contemporary Christianity. This is where the modern day Pentecostal and Charismatic churches (speaking in tongues, baptism of the Holy Spirit, etc.) and the Church of Christ and the Christian Church (water baptism is essential for salvation) lose the “ancient landmark,” Israel. If you keep your eye on the landmark and pay close attention to the context, this chapter is easily understood.

Here’s the whole chapter in one sentence: Jews from all over the world (2:5-11) came to Jerusalem (the holiest city of the Jews) to celebrate Pentecost (a Jewish holiday, 2:1) where they saw the sign of tongues (Jews require a sign) and heard a Jewish Apostle (Peter) tell them that just 50 days prior, they had killed their Jewish Messiah (2:22-24,36), and that they needed to do exactly what John the Baptist (the last Jewish prophet) and Jesus (their Jewish Messiah) told them to do in the Gospels (repent and be baptized in water for the remission of sins (Matt. 3:1,2; Luke 3:3; Matt. 4:17; John 3:22,23; 4:1,2), to prepare themselves for the soon coming “Kingdom of Heaven!”

Obviously, you get the point! This passage deals exclusively with the Nation of Israel! Simply stated, unless you’re a Jew living in 33 A.D., there’s no need for you to speak with tongues, and water baptism does not save you from your sins!

Acts 3—

Again, we see from the context that God is dealing exclusively with the Nation of Israel. Note that Peter and John (Jewish Apostles) are on their way to the temple (the Jewish place of worship) at the hour of prayer (Jews prayed three times a day) and Peter performs a miracle (Jews require a sign) and upon seeing the crowd gathering (other Jews at the temple to pray), Peter tells them that they killed the Jewish Messiah (3:13-16), but tells them that if they repent, Jesus will return to establish His literal, earthly, Jewish kingdom! (3:19-21). In this passage, Peter is offering Israel a second chance to accept Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah, and prepare themselves for the coming of His literal earthly kingdom.

WEEK 46, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: ACTS 5-7

OVERVIEW:

Internal and external opposition (chapters 5 and 6); the final offer of the Kingdom of Heaven rejected by the Nation of Israel (chapter 7).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Acts chapters 3 through 6 reveal to us two forms of Satanic opposition: external and internal. External opposition occurs in the form of persecution. We witness two cycles of persecution meted out on Peter and John by the Jewish leaders in chapter 4:1-22, and again in chapter 5:17-40. Though Peter and John appear to be the objects of wrath, and though the Jewish religious leaders seem to be the persecutors, the fact is, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places!" (Ephesians 6:12) The real object of wrath is Jesus (4:17, 18; 5:28,40), and the real persecutor is none other than Satan. Maybe you've noticed that you can talk about Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, the occult, etc. with virtually any group of people in any public place, but as soon as you mention the name of Jesus, an uproar is sure to follow! The devil hates the name of Jesus. And be sure you recognize what it is in these chapters that angered the Jewish religious leaders (and the devil) the most! It was the preaching and teaching of the gospel! (4:2, 18; 5:28) A very basic rule of thumb in the spiritual realm is this: if the devil doesn't like it, it must be effective, so we should do it all the more! Teaching and preaching is the primary action of the Great Commission: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19, 20) Teaching and preaching is the primary function of a pastor. (See Acts 2:14,42; 3:12; 4:31; 5:20,42; 6:1-4; Colossians 1:28; II Timothy 4:17; Titus 1:3; I Corinthians 1:21; I Timothy 4:11-16; II Timothy 4:1,2; I Timothy 5:17; Galatians 6:6) Therefore, Satan will do anything he can to stop the preaching and teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

And if Satan can't stop the gospel with his external opposition, then he'll walk right in the front doors of the church and try internal opposition. That's what happens in Acts 5. Ananias and Sapphira were held in esteem by their fellow-believers because they vowed to sell their property and give ALL of the proceeds to the church. But in an effort to appear to be more spiritual than they actually were, they both told Peter that they were offering all of the money they had received for the land they had sold—when they had actually kept back a portion for themselves. They must have thought, "What a great plan! The church will think we're really spiritual for sacrificing so much, and we'll still be rich! No one will ever know." But though we can fool men, we can't fool an omniscient God! Peter defines their offense clearly, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God!" (Acts 5:4) And with that, they both dropped dead right on the spot! (5:5,10) Keep in mind, the issue here wasn't that they didn't give all of the proceeds from the sale of their property in the offering. Neither God nor the Apostles had required that. The issue was the fact that they lied to the Apostles about the money, and in the process, lied to God Himself!

And if you're wondering whether or not the Sunday attendance dropped after that—it most certainly did! But it was all part of God's plan! You see, God always purges His church and purifies His people in preparation for new fruit! (See 5:11–14)

Another form of internal opposition comes in these chapters from the envy, strife and complaining among believers. Keep in mind that the Grecians' complaint in Acts 6 was legitimate and certainly needed to be addressed, but consider also that the devil is more than happy to keep us busy with "legitimate needs" and many "good things," as long as it keeps us from the best things: prayer and the Word of God! Do you remember Jesus' instruction to Martha when she was so busy working to serve Him while Mary sat at His feet, communing with Him? Jesus said to her,

"Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41, 42) Likewise, the Apostles' chose "that good part" in Acts 6 by continuing to "sit at Jesus' feet" in prayer and the ministry of the Word! (6:2, 4) They delegated the "legitimate need" to carefully selected "deacons" (6:3,5-7) so they could carry out their primary function as leaders in the church. With regard to deacons, it is significant to note that God even holds those who carry out the simplest forms of service in His church to a standard of "honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." (6:3)

Finally, in chapter 7, we have come to the first key event, or turning point in the Book of Acts. Acts 7 is the answer to the question the Apostles had in Acts 1:6 concerning whether or not this would be the time Jesus would set up His kingdom—and marks the beginning of five of the seven transitions in the Book. Acts 7 is the third and final offer of the King and His kingdom to the Nation of Israel. Stephen preaches an incredible sermon with three significant points:

- First, that God promised us (Israel) a land. (7:2-7)
- Second, that God promised us a Prophet like Moses. (7:20,37)
- Third, but you leaders always kill God's prophets and fail to respond properly to God's message! (7:51-53)

Needless to say, the council was enraged by Stephen's message, and immediately picked up stones to stone him. To understand the significance of this event, we need to pay close attention to what Stephen said in verse 56: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." Notice, Stephen saw two very significant things: "the heavens opened" and "the Son of man standing." It is interesting that immediately following His ascension in Acts 1:9-11, the Bible tells us that Jesus SAT down at the right hand of the Father! Hebrews 10:12 states, "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God." Colossians 3:1 tells us that even today in the Church Age, Jesus is SEATED at the Father's right hand: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." So, the fact that Stephen saw the heavens opened and Jesus STANDING at the Father's right hand as he was being stoned is incredibly significant. The next time we find Jesus standing and the heavens opened is Revelation 4:1-3 and 5:1 and 5 where Jesus rises to take the book with seven seals from the Father's hand—which marks the beginning of the Tribulation period! So, why is Jesus STANDING in Acts 7? It's because He is awaiting the Nation of Israel's response! If there will be a national repentance (and had the Jewish ruling council that is listening to Stephen's message repented—the entire nation would have followed their lead!), then Jesus will open the first seal of the Tribulation Period (Rev.6)—and Daniel's seventieth week will begin. If the message is rejected, then Jesus will sit back down, Israel will be "blinded in part" (Romans 11:25), and the Church Age will begin. Clearly, the stoning of Stephen is a rejection of God's offer, and as expected, we find Jesus seated for the duration of the Church Age. (Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1) Consequently, God turns His attention to the gospel of the "Kingdom of God" (the spiritual, internal kingdom) and to all of the Gentile nations under heaven, as we will see in Acts 8.

WEEK 46, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: ACTS 8-10

OVERVIEW:

The transition from Israel to the Gentiles (chapter 8); the salvation of the missionary to the Gentiles (chapter 9); the transition to the Gentiles confirmed by apostolic authority (chapter 10).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Thus far we have seen that Acts 1-7 is exclusively Jewish because God is still offering the Messiah and the Kingdom of Heaven to the Nation of Israel. The all-important question of Acts 1:6: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" has been answered with a resounding, "No!" This "no" was effectively communicated through the stoning of Stephen and the fact that Jesus went from STANDING in Acts 7:56—to being SEATED in Colossians 3:1. The Nation of Israel has clearly rejected the offer of both their Messiah and His kingdom: the literal, physical, earthly Kingdom of Heaven. God's plan for Israel has been postponed and the "parenthesis" of the Church Age is beginning.

It is also worth noting that the stoning of Stephen led to a "great persecution" against the believers, causing many of them to flee Jerusalem. As they did, Acts 8:1 says they began preaching the gospel "abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria." God was even able to use persecution to accomplish His own mission of sending witnesses to "all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth!" (Acts 1:8)

Acts chapter 8 marks the beginning of the transition from God accomplishing His plan through the Nation of Israel to the accomplishment of His plan through a body of people called the Church, which is composed of both Jews and Gentiles. (Ephesians 2:11-22) And notice how orderly God makes the transition from Israel to the Church! First, believers witness in "all Judaea." (8:1c) Second, Philip, the deacon mentioned in Acts 6:5 and called "the evangelist" in Acts 21:8, preaches the Kingdom of God (the spiritual kingdom that resides inside of a believer) to "the Samaritans," who are half-Jew and half-Gentile. (8:5) And third, the witness extends to "the uttermost," as Philip preaches to a full-blooded Gentile on his way home from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. (8:27,28) It is also important to note that God withheld the gift of the Holy Ghost from the Samaritans until Peter and John arrived in Samaria. (8:14-17) This was done for two reasons: 1) To prove to the Apostles in Jerusalem that the Samaritans had truly received the Word of God; and 2) To prove to the Samaritans that the Apostles in Jerusalem were God's ordained authorities.

In these early chapters in the Book of Acts (Acts 1-7) as the King and His Kingdom were still being offered to the Nation of Israel, the Apostle Peter has been the dominant voice, because he is the Apostle to the Jews. (Galatians 2:7, 8) However, a new character, Paul, enters the scene in chapter 9. We are first introduced to Paul in Acts 7:58 where he is called by his birth name, Saul. (Acts 13:9) Paul, by his own admission, was the chief persecutor of the church. He says in Acts 9:1, "[I breathed] out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," and continues in Acts 22:19, saying, "[I] imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed." In 1 Timothy 1:13 he confesses that, "[I] was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious." You know how we would refer to a guy by this description in today's world? A terrorist! And the crazy thing is, Paul was one of the most religious men on the face of the earth! In Philippians 3:4-6 Paul talked about his religiousness, saying, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."

Oddly enough, religion has always been and continues to be the most destructive force on this planet to the work of God. It was the religious Jewish council who crucified our Lord. It was the religious Jewish council who stoned Stephen. And it was a religious leader (Paul) who was the most destructive force against the early church. But consider the rest of Paul's testimony: Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:13–16, "[I] was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." Wow! What a radical transformation! Listen, if God could save a terrorist like Paul, He can save and transform anyone! Paul actually goes from being the chief misery of the church—to the chief missionary of the church! Hallelujah!

And note that Paul was specifically saved to be a missionary to the Gentiles. In Acts 9:15, God says, "[Paul] is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." From this chapter forward in the Book of Acts, Peter's role as the Apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:7, 8) diminishes, while Paul's role as the Apostle to the Gentiles increases. In fact, Peter's name is only mentioned one more time after Acts 13, while Paul's is mentioned 129 times! Obviously, there has been a major transition.

Acts chapter 10 continues the transition from Israel to the Church with Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, reluctantly preaching to a family of Gentiles. Notice that the heavens open again (10:11), but rather than seeing Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father (Acts 7:56), Peter sees a vessel of unclean animals descending and hears a voice instructing him to kill and eat them. According to Old Testament law (Lev. 20:25; Deut. 14:1- 29), Jews were to avoid eating certain kinds of animals—specifically, animals that God Himself called "unclean." So Peter, being a devout Jewish believer in Christ, refuses the offer to eat the unclean animals. But pay close attention to God's response to Peter. God says to Peter, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." (10:15) God is trying to let Peter know that He is transitioning from Israel to the Church by using unclean animals as a metaphor for the Gentiles. In effect, God is saying, "Peter, I'm doing something new now—so I no longer want you to consider the Gentiles as 'unclean,' or unworthy of salvation." But Peter has a very difficult time accepting the fact that God will save Gentiles. At this point in the transition, we might consider him an "unbelieving Jew!" Soon, however, Peter finds himself preaching to a family of Gentiles who suddenly begin speaking in tongues. Keep in mind here some of the things we learned in the early chapters in Acts, namely, that Jews require a sign (I Corinthians 1:22), and tongues are a sign for unbelieving Jews (I Corinthians 14:22). So do you see what's actually happening here in Acts 10? These Gentiles spoke with tongues as a sign to Peter, who in this context, is a Jew who doesn't believe that God will save Gentiles! Once the other eleven Apostles in Jerusalem catch wind of this "casting of pearls before swine," Peter is called to answer for this blatantly disobedient act of preaching to the Gentiles. (Acts 11:1-3) As Peter begins to defend himself, the most convincing evidence he offers to the Jewish Apostles is the sign of tongues. (Acts 11:15-18) By the end of the meeting, the Jewish church in Jerusalem declares: "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." (Acts 11:18) The transition from Israel to the Church is almost complete.

Let's briefly summarize the transitions that we've discovered:

Acts 1–6 – God is offering the King and the Kingdom of Heaven to the Nation of Israel.

Acts 7 – Israel rejects the King and the Kingdom of Heaven for the third time.

Acts 8 – God makes an orderly transition from Jews to Samaritans, and from Samaritans to Gentiles.

Acts 9 – The transition from Peter, the apostle to the Jews, to Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

Acts 10 – God's transition to the Gentiles is confirmed by the apostolic authority of Peter.

WEEK 47, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: ACTS 11-14

OVERVIEW:

The transition from Jerusalem to Antioch (chapters 11 and 12); Paul's first missionary journey (chapters 13 and 14).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we begin today, let's take a few moments to review what we've discovered thus far from the Book of Acts. Acts 1-6 is the record of God continuing to offer the Messiah and the Kingdom of Heaven to the Nation of Israel. In chapter 7 with the stoning of Stephen, the question the Apostles had in Acts 1:6 regarding whether it would be the time the Kingdom would be established has been answered by the Nation of Israel, and God withdraws His offer of the Messiah and His physical Kingdom. Chapter 8 marks the beginning of the transition from God dealing with the Nation of Israel to God dealing with a racially mixed group of Jews and Gentiles called the Church, the body of Christ. Chapter 9 continues the transition with the salvation and calling of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. In chapter 10, Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, confirms that God is indeed offering eternal life to the Gentiles. From these chapters alone, God has made it abundantly clear that He has postponed His dealings with the Nation of Israel and has begun to focus His attention on the Church.

Today, in chapters 11 through 14, we will discover the final phases of this monumental transition. Chapter 11 reveals a transition from God's base of operations moving from Jerusalem to Antioch. You see, when the persecution arose in chapter 8, though the Apostles remained in Jerusalem, the majority of believers fled. (8:1) Through their witness, each time a new people group received the Word of God, envoys from Jerusalem were sent to confirm God's working among them. (See Acts 8:14-17, 25; 11:1-3, 19-22) Even Paul himself needed affirmation from the Apostles in Jerusalem to validate his ministry. (Gal. 2:1, 9) All of these components point to the fact that Jerusalem was the base of operations and place of authority for the early church. And it only makes perfect sense, because...

- 1) If you were a believing Jew waiting for Jesus your Messiah to return to the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9-12; Zech. 14:1-9) to establish the capital of His kingdom in Jerusalem at His second coming—why be any place other than Jerusalem and miss all of the action?!
- 2) If you were seeking to only reach the Jews with the message of the Kingdom of Heaven, Jerusalem was where there was the greatest concentration of Jews in the entire region—not to mention the world! And...
- 3) If the Apostle to the Jews (Peter) resided in Jerusalem, where else would God's base of operations be?

But with Israel's rejection of the King and His Kingdom in Acts 7, God turns His attention to the Gentiles, and therefore, establishes a new base of operations in Antioch. Watch how chapter 11 unfolds...

Once the Apostles in Jerusalem had confirmed the salvation of the Gentiles (11:18), Barnabas seeks out Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, and brings him to Antioch (11:25, 26) where a multi-ethnic church of Jews and Gentiles had been planted. (Acts 13:1) Notice also, that it was in Antioch that "the disciples were called Christians first." (11:26) It is significant to note that for the first ten years of the church, not one believer had ever been called a "Christian!" Not until God makes the transitions from Israel to the Church, and Jerusalem to Antioch, does God see fit to have His followers called "Christians"—another confirmation that Antioch is the new base of operations.

In the next chapter, it is evident that the Apostles now understand that God has postponed His plan for Israel. The first piece of evidence is that the Apostle James is not replaced after his execution. Jesus promised the twelve apostles, "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in

the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matthew 19:28) Since the Apostles believed the Lord's return was imminent, we find that in the early part of the Book of Acts, when the King and His physical Kingdom was still being offered to Israel, the Apostles wanted to be sure there were 12 Apostles in place. That's why when Judas Iscariot committed suicide, they believed a replacement was necessary to fill the twelfth throne. (Acts 1:15-26) The fact that the Apostle James was not replaced clearly indicates that the Apostles recognized that Christ's return had been postponed and the Church would now be God's primary vehicle for carrying out His purpose and plan on the earth.

Another evidence that God's center of global outreach was transitioning from Jerusalem to Antioch is seen in the fact that when Peter leaves Jerusalem, he doesn't return. (12:19) The leadership team of Peter, James and John is obviously being dismantled and Jerusalem's central authority is waning.

In Acts 13, God introduces His new institution for fulfilling His plan... the Church! It is multi-racial (13:1), multi-cultural (13:1) and missional (13:2-4). As the Word of God was being proclaimed in this local church, the Spirit of God begins to move in their midst, and calls out Paul and Barnabas to perform a particular “work.” (13:2) That “work,” as we see in Acts 13 and 14, is preaching the gospel and reproducing local churches—and specifically, local churches who, likewise, carry the mission of planting other local churches—who carry the mission of reproducing other local churches! We may deduce then, that the work of both the local church and of missionaries is preaching the gospel and planting reproducing local churches. Though many faithful Christians serve in diverse capacities in missions—preaching the gospel and church planting are the preeminent components of missions.

A comparison of the sermons preached by Peter and those preached by Paul give further evidence that God was no longer offering the Kingdom of Heaven to Israel, but instead, intended to bring all men into the spiritual, internal Kingdom of God. Peter's sermon is simply, “You Jews killed our Messiah and rejected the kingdom. Repent and be baptized in water!” (See Acts 2:36-38; 3:15, 19, 20) Paul's message, however, is, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through [Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Peter's message is the gospel of the kingdom, while Paul's is the gospel of grace. (See 13:42, 43)

Acts 13:4 – 14:26 is the record of Paul's first missionary journey in approximately 46 AD. On this first journey, the gospel was preached and churches were planted on the Island of Cyprus, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Perga. All of these cities, except Cyprus, are in the region known as Galatia, which is modern day Turkey. The journey took approximately two years and covered nearly 1,250 miles!

WEEK 47, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: ACTS 15-17

OVERVIEW:

The Jerusalem church addresses false teaching (chapter 15); Paul's second missionary journey (chapters 16 and 17).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Acts 15 introduces to us continuing controversy surrounding the salvation of the Gentiles. When Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch of Syria they are met by some false teachers who are disputing with and convincing the newly saved Gentiles that they must be circumcised to be saved. Indeed, circumcision was a significant symbolic act under the Old Testament law, but through the blood of Jesus Christ, the law had been satisfied and circumcision was no longer necessary. (Galatians 5:6) Paul, seeing the gospel in jeopardy, begins "no small dissension and disputation" (15:2) with these false teachers. Finally, it is determined that this question must be addressed by the Apostles in Jerusalem.

Peter makes the point that whether Jew or Gentile, all are saved by grace so, "why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (15:10) James settles the dispute, saying, "My sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood." (15:19, 20) The question, then, is if the Gentiles are saved by grace, why do they have to "abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication," (15:29) when none of those things are related to salvation or sanctification? James answers the question in verse 21: "For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day." What James was saying is that these stipulations were to be followed by the Gentiles in an effort to keep the door of faith open to the Jews. This is the same principle Paul followed in his ministry and described in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 where he states, "Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law... I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake." To settle the issue, the Apostles determined to send a letter with Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas to be delivered to the church at Antioch with the decision that had been made concerning the Gentiles, which when read to the church, was cause for great rejoicing!

In approximately 50 AD, Paul and Barnabas determine to revisit the cities where they had preached the gospel and planted churches. The only problem was that they couldn't agree on who should be their companions. It is interesting to behold how that even the "heroes of the faith" are sometimes carnal, stubborn and self-willed! Barnabas takes his nephew, John Mark, who abandoned them on their first journey, and heads for Cyprus following the original route (15:39). Paul selects Silas (also called Silvanus) and takes a new route through Syria and Cilicia. (15:40, 41)

Chapter 16 opens with Paul and Silas arriving in the neighboring cities of Derbe and Lystra. Paul is impressed by a young disciple named Timotheus (Timothy) who has a remarkable testimony in his hometown of Lystra, and even into a neighboring city, Iconium. (16:2) Paul invites Timothy to join him and Silas on this second journey, but determines that Timothy must first be circumcised since he is half Jewish (16:1,3). Be sure to recognize that Timothy was NOT circumcised as part of his salvation or sanctification, but simply to not be a hindrance in preaching the gospel to the Jews. (I Corinthians 9:19-23)

After passing through Phrygia and Galatia (16:6), Paul's team is "forbidden of the Holy Ghost" to go anywhere but Macedonia. Once the team lands at Philippi, a chief city of Macedonia, we discover exactly why God wanted them

there. God had arranged divine appointments with lost souls like Lydia and her family (16:14), a young girl possessed by a demon (16:16-18), the Philippian jailer and his family (16:30-34), Jews and Gentiles in Thessalonica and Berea (17:1-4,10-12), as well as Dionysius, Damaris and others in Athens. (17:34) this is the biblical principle of Proverbs 16:9 in action: "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps." Paul's heart was leading him to Asia and Bithynia, but God directed his steps to Macedonia. Imagine the consequences if Paul had been stiffnecked, insisting upon his own plans and strategy, and forcing his way into Asia and Bithynia and neglected Macedonia? He would have missed God's supernatural orchestration of events, and the precious people listed above may have entered eternity in the flames of hell!

Has God put obstacles, hindrances or roadblocks in the path of your plans? Don't be stiffnecked! Trust the Lord. May the Lord direct our steps!

WEEK 47, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: ACTS 18-21

OVERVIEW:

Paul's ministry at Corinth (chapter 18); Paul's ministry at Ephesus (chapter 19); Paul begins his journey to Jerusalem (chapter 20); Paul's arrival in Jerusalem (chapter 21).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

By the time we open our Bibles to Acts 18 in today's reading, Paul and his missionary team have preached throughout Syria and Cilicia (15:41), the cities of Lystra and Derbe (16:1), throughout Phrygia and Galatia (16:6), the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea in Macedonia (16:11,12; 17:1,10), and Athens, Greece (17:15).

In virtually every place, the preaching of the gospel and the teaching of the Word of God have been met with great opposition and persecution. In II Corinthians 11:23-28, Paul described his persistent sufferings in these terms: "In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." Wow! What a resume! If God's "whatever, wherever, whenever" for you and me included such persecutions, would we still obey Him? Remember, Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 16:24, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Matt. 16:24)

Acts 18 begins with Paul traveling from Athens to Corinth, a city in the Roman province of Achaia. (18:12) Corinth was a wealthy city, a center of intellectualism, and a city famous for its excess, carnality and perversion. Every day was Mardi Gras in Corinth. It was the New Orleans, Amsterdam or Bangkok of biblical times! To be a Corinthian was to almost automatically be associated with sexual promiscuity. In fact, "Corinthian woman" was a proverbial phrase for a prostitute, and "to play the Corinthian," was to play the whore, or indulge in whorish behavior. Paul was sent there to shine the light of the glorious gospel of Christ into their great darkness. Prior to Paul's arrival, God had already arranged a meeting between Paul and a Jewish couple (Aquila and Priscilla) who had been exiled there from Rome. This couple became faithful followers of Christ, using all of their resources to further the gospel of Jesus Christ. Aquila and Priscilla were sound in doctrine, having been used of God to correct Apollos' outdated teaching in Acts 18:25,26. Paul called this couple his "helpers in Christ Jesus" in Romans 16:3, even noting that they had "laid down their own necks" for his sake. (Rom. 16:4) All of the Gentile churches also gave thanks for Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:4), and when they returned to Rome, their home became the meeting place of the church. (Rom. 16:5) Aquila and Priscilla knew what marriage was all about: a joint venture in advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Paul carried out a fruitful ministry in Corinth for "a year and six months." (18:11) In that time, some prestigious men came to Christ: Justus, whose house was structurally connected to the Jewish synagogue; Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue; and eventually, another chief ruler of the synagogue and the man who had initially caused a riot over Paul's preaching: Sosthenes. (18:17; I Cor. 1:1,2)

In due time, Paul, along with Aquila and Priscilla, departed for Ephesus where Aquila and Priscilla were left, Paul continuing on to Caesarea—and eventually returning home to Antioch of Syria. (18:22,23) While at Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla met a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt named Apollos, a powerful preacher who needed to be brought up to date doctrinally. When they encountered him, Apollos was still preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven and

performing the “baptism of John.” Apollos had no idea that Jesus the Messiah had already come and gone... that God’s plan for Israel had been postponed... and that the Church Age was already in effect. Aquila and Priscilla enlightened this evangelist and brought him into the present by explaining the events of the past 22 years. (18:26) Apollos humbly and joyfully receives the new revelation, begins preaching that Jesus is the Christ—and moves on to Corinth. (19:1)

While Apollos is at Corinth, Paul begins his third missionary journey, passing through Phrygia and Galatia (18:23) and landing at Ephesus (19:1), where he finds some of Apollos’ converts. As Jesus said, “The disciple is not above his master.” (Matt. 10:24) Like their discipler (Apollos), all these guys really understood about the New Testament was connected with the Jewish baptism of John the Baptist. Like Apollos, they, too, were totally unaware that the Messiah had already come and gone. Obviously, these disciples of Apollos had not been born again, because salvation comes only through Jesus Christ (see John 14:6)—and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost is the evidence of that salvation! Romans 8:9 says it very plainly, “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” These disciples, however, have never even heard of Jesus Christ or the Holy Ghost! (19:1-4) Paul preaches the gospel of grace to them, they call on the name of Jesus, they are then baptized in water in Jesus’ name, and they immediately receive the Holy Ghost, speaking with tongues and prophesying. (19:4-6) Remember... tongues are a sign to skeptical Jews! (I Cor. 1:22; 14:22) The events here at Ephesus are exactly like the events in Samaria (Acts 8:14-16), in that Paul’s apostolic authority and his message is validated by the sign of tongues. These Jewish disciples of Apollos now know with certainty that Paul’s gospel is the true gospel.

Paul had a fruitful few years at Ephesus (19:9,10,18-20), and the Word of God had free course throughout Asia (modern day Asia Minor). However, his success was stifled by a massive riot which forced him to begin his journey to Jerusalem. (19:21; 20:1) On his way to Jerusalem, Paul revisits many of the places wherein he had initially preached the gospel and planted churches, ministering to and edifying the disciples.

Paul, knowing that Jerusalem would mark the beginning of his end, is not afraid to die for the name of the Lord Jesus (21:13), because long ago, at his salvation, Paul had surrendered his life into the hands of His Saviour and Lord. Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:12, “For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” Paul fearlessly and confidently declares in 2 Tim. 4:6-8, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

O God, like Paul, may we live our lives with great confidence and assurance—fearlessly abandoned to You... and to Your will for our lives.

WEEK 47, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: ACTS 22-25

OVERVIEW:

Paul's testimony before riotous Jews (chapter 22); Paul's testimony before the Jewish Council (chapter 23); Paul's testimony before Felix, the governor of Judea (chapter 24); Paul's testimony before Festus (chapter 25).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Paul's arrival in Jerusalem marked the beginning of his end. In Acts 21, the Jews of Jerusalem had stirred up a riot crying out, "Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place." (21:28) The Roman chief captain of Jerusalem, not wanting this riot to reach Caesar's ears for his job's sake, immediately halted the riot, rescuing Paul from certain death. (21:31,32)

Chapter 22 is Paul's testimony before the riotous Jewish crowd. As soon as he mentions preaching to Gentiles (22:21, 22), the crowd returns to a nearly unmanageable uproar. The chief captain was about to scourge Paul until he discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen. With that revelation, Paul inserted himself into the flow of the Roman legal system, thereby guaranteeing him an audience with leading political figures in the Roman government, even Caesar himself.

The chapters that follow record Paul's testimony before a few of these figures. In chapter 23, Paul stands before the Jewish council once again in Jerusalem. In chapter 24, Paul is transferred to Caesarea, the Roman provincial seat of Judea, where he stands before governor Felix. Felix is replaced by Festus (24:27), and in chapter 25, Paul gives testimony before Festus and the Jewish council.

Though there are many truths and applications that are worthy of discussion in today's reading, let's focus our attention on a few truths related to Paul's suffering... and how his suffering relates to ours.

1. Suffering was a natural part of Paul's commission, as it is a natural part of our commission. When God commissioned Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles, he described his ministry this way: "He (Paul) is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:15,16) God promised that Paul would have the incredible privilege of preaching the gospel to Gentiles, to kings, and to the children of Israel, so what Paul was experiencing in Acts 21-25 was actually God's faithfulness in keeping His promises. But God's faithfulness also included the promise of suffering. God would likewise be faithful in keeping that promise. One of the many things that made Paul so unique as a follower of Christ was the fact that he joyfully accepted suffering as the normal and natural result of following Christ, and reckoned that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18) And you see, Paul was able to keep that perspective because he was constantly looking into the eternal realm, and passionately using his life to invest in Christ's everlasting kingdom. (2 Cor. 4:18; 2 Peter 1:11) God promised those of us who desire to live like Paul: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim. 3:12) If we live like Paul, and we, too, look at and live for a different Kingdom... if we are constantly seeking to give the gospel to the lost... and constantly seeking to live a holy life for His glory... there's no doubt about it—we will suffer! But always keep in mind, if we invest in eternity, a greater hope and reward is yet before us!

2. Suffering brings us into a deeper intimacy with Christ, because through it, we are able to fellowship with Him in a much deeper and personal way. (Phil. 3:10) Paul was one of the few human beings who actually understood that principle. You see, with the persecution and suffering Paul experienced, if he would have viewed it from the standpoint of a natural man, it wouldn't be hard to imagine Paul saying something like, "God, here I am witnessing for you, seeking to live a holy life for Your glory, and this is what I get?!" It's the complaint we often hear from lost people: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Though that sounds like a very legitimate question, the reality is, it's actually a very self-righteous and self-centered question! It's self-righteous, because we're calling ourselves "good" when Romans 3:12 clearly states, "there is none that doeth good, no, not one." It's self-centered, because it assumes that life is all about us when Revelation 4:11 plainly declares, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created!" The real question should be, "Why do good things happen to such bad people?" And you see, that was Paul's perspective. Paul was so thankful for the price that Jesus Christ paid for him that he actually considered the sufferings he endured in this life a blessing! In fact, suffering like Christ was one of his goals in life! He says in Philippians 3:8-10, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."

Again, Paul understood the biblical principle that we so desperately need to learn in the 21st century... suffering is a natural and normal part of our calling. (1 Peter 2:21) And it is through suffering, we not only become more like Christ, but become more intimately acquainted with Him. Oh God, please grant us that perspective.

WEEK 47, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: ACTS 26-28

OVERVIEW:

Paul's testimony before King Agrippa (chapter 26); Paul's journey to and arrival in Rome (chapters 27 and 28).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we move into chapter 26 today, we find Paul giving his testimony before king Agrippa. Agrippa is the great grandson of Herod the Great who sought to kill Jesus at his birth. (Matthew 2:1-16) We will observe two key features of Paul's message before King Agrippa: 1) The SINCERE CONCERN of Paul's Message; and 2) The SIMPLE CONTENT of Paul's Message.

1. THE SINCERE CONCERN OF PAUL'S MESSAGE.

It would have been easy for Paul to despise the corrupt and wicked rulers before whom he had been on trial. Clearly, none of them were willing to take a stand for the truth and declare Paul's innocence. (23:27-29; 24:12, 13; 26:31) The Jews falsely accused Paul and wanted to kill him. (21:28, 29; 23:12-15) Felix kept Paul in prison in hopes of a bribe (24:26), and to please the wicked Jews. (24:27) Festus also kept Paul bound in an attempt to keep the Jews happy. (25:9) It seems that "justice" was going to the highest bidder—or to the best liar. But despite all of this injustice and corruption causing him to become bitter or angry, Paul simply did what Paul always did: he passionately declared the gospel of Jesus Christ—sincerely longing for the salvation of these wicked men! Even when king Agrippa, one of the most perverted and corrupt men imaginable, sarcastically commented to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," (26:28) Paul sincerely responded, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." (26:29) Paul's compassion for the souls of these corrupt men allowed him to see past their wickedness to the cross where Christ died for their sins. With all of the love in his heart, Paul longed to see the salvation of every man—even his persecutors! Oh, may God fill us with the sincere passion and compassion of this faithful servant and follower of Christ! Remember, Jesus taught us in Matthew 5:44: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you."

2. THE SIMPLE CONTENT OF PAUL'S MESSAGE.

It's important for us to pay close attention to the content of Paul's message each time he stood before a government official. Had it been me, I probably would have been up all night, wracking my brain, trying to craft the most moving, thought-provoking and powerful sermon imaginable. But not Paul! Each time he stands before a world ruler, he simply gives his testimony—with a very simple presentation of the gospel. He didn't get stressed, nor did he concern himself with brilliance or eloquence. His message was essentially this: "I once was lost, but now I'm found!" Paul's simple approach gives evidence that he had truly taken to heart the words Jesus had spoken concerning him, that he would "be his witness unto all men of what thou hast SEEN and HEARD." (Acts 22:15) Paul understood that he was only responsible for declaring that! Again, may we learn from this choice servant and follower of Christ! May we genuinely understand that God doesn't need us to be intellectual elitists, eloquent preachers, or Bible experts! We simply need to declare boldly what we have SEEN and HEARD!

The great evangelist H.A. Ironside's preaching was once interrupted by an atheist shouting, "There is no God! Jesus is a myth!" After continuous interruptions, the man finally said, "I challenge you to a debate!" Ironside responded, "I accept your challenge, sir—but on one condition! When you come, bring with you 10 men and women whose lives have been changed for the better by the message of atheism. Bring former prostitutes and criminals whose lives

have been changed, who are now moral and responsible individuals. Bring outcasts who had no hope and have them tell us how becoming atheists has lifted them out of the pit! And sir," he concluded, "if you can find 10 such men and women, I will be happy to debate you. And when I come, I will gladly bring with me 200 men and women from this very city whose lives have been transformed in just those ways by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Oh, may we never forget that the simple testimony of a changed life is a powerful witness to the transforming power of Christ! Ask God to open a door for you today, to simply tell someone what you've SEEN and HEARD.

After a difficult journey, Paul finally landed at Rome (28:16) around 60 A.D., where he was permitted to live in a rented house—in which he received guests, and constantly preached the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. For the next two years, Acts 28:31 says Paul continued "Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." It is believed that Paul also wrote his epistles to Philemon, Timothy, Titus, the Ephesians, the Colossians and the Philippians during this Roman "imprisonment." According to the record of history, Paul was beheaded sometime after 64 A.D. during Nero's severe persecution of Christians. During this same persecution, Peter was also crucified. (History records that Peter requested that he be crucified upside-down because he didn't consider himself worthy to be crucified in the same manner as our Lord.)

But before we complete our discussion of the Book of Acts today, let's consider what may be the most important lesson of this incredible Book. It is very simply this: God takes full responsibility for accomplishing His own mission!

Actually, the Book of Acts is rather comical when you consider how confused these "great men and women of God" in the early church were for the first 27 years of their ministry. The believers in Acts 1-7 had no idea whether or not Christ would immediately return to restore the Kingdom to Israel, so they had sold their houses and all of their possessions and camped out in Jerusalem so they didn't miss His Second Coming. (Acts 1:6,7; 2:44-47; 4:34,35; Zechariah 14:1-9) The Apostles were startled and confused when the Samaritans and Gentiles started getting saved. (Acts 11:1-3,18) The Jewish believers had an extremely difficult time letting go of circumcision and other components of the law of Moses so they could be free to simply trust the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ for their salvation and/or their sanctification. (Acts 15:1,2) The Apostles were most certainly shocked when God postponed His dealings with Israel in order to begin working with a new institution, the Church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles. (Rom. 11:25; Eph. 3:1-13)

When you put it all together, you begin to realize, that from a human standpoint, living in the time of the early church could have been frustrating and confusing IF you were attempting to analyze and formalize God. If, however, you "walked by faith and not by sight," then every day would have been a tremendous adventure! Consider some of the incredible "acts" we have seen the Lord Jesus Christ carry out through the Apostles in this Book...

First, consider how God's ancient arrangement of the Jewish holy feasts "just happened" to bring the Jews at "just the right time" and to "just the right place" to be able to witness the crucifixion of their Messiah at Passover. Then, 50 days later at Pentecost, to bring them together again, to have the opportunity to repent of their fatal error of crucifying their own Messiah! (Acts 2) And do you remember how we saw God intervene on behalf of Peter and John, freeing them from prison to continue preaching to the people in Acts 5:17-20? And don't forget how God used the persecution that arose after the stoning of Stephen to serve His purposes in motivating the obstinate Jewish believers to get out of Jerusalem and carry out the rest of His mission to Judea, Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth! (Acts 1:8; 8:1) And how about how God supernaturally arranged Philip's meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch? (Acts 8:26-30) And what about the perfectly timed salvation of Saul (Paul), the Apostle to the Gentiles in Acts 9, and Peter's visit to Cornelius' house in Acts 10? And we could go on and on with all of the supernatural "acts" God was orchestrating on behalf of the Apostles!

So, again, what's the main "take-away" from this key Book of the Bible?

That God will accomplish His own mission despite our cluelessness, and despite our human inabilities and frailties. If we surrender ourselves to Him daily, we will have the amazing honor of joining God where He is already working. Have a great adventure with God today!

WEEK 48, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: ROMANS 1- 3

OVERVIEW:

The righteousness of God required by the heathen (chapter 1); the righteousness of God required by the hypocrite and Hebrew (chapter 2); the righteousness of God required by all of humanity (chapter 3).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

To this point in our reading through the New Testament we have been in the historical section. In the four Gospels, we were able to see four historical perspectives of Jesus Christ's person and ministry. The Book of Acts revealed to us the history of the early church through the "acts of the apostles," and allowed us to see the transition that occurred from God's dealing with the Nation of Israel to God's dealing with the Church. As we have learned, there are three key transitional Books in the New Testament:

1. Matthew—which bridges from the Old Testament to the New Testament.
2. Acts—which bridges from the Nation of Israel to the Church.
3. Hebrews—which bridges from the Church back to the Nation of Israel.

We have just crossed the HISTORICAL bridge provided by the Book of Acts, and are now entering the DOCTRINAL teachings of the Church Age.

Without a doubt, the Book of Romans is the greatest Book in the Bible on Christian doctrine. It is very different from the other New Testament Books in that Paul is not writing to address doctrinal or practical problems with this church. What God is actually developing through the content of this Book is the handbook that gives us God's viewpoint of what He is doing in and through His church. That's why God placed this Book immediately following the Book of Acts. Right after we come through the historical section of the New Testament, and prior to getting into the other church epistles, God provides us His handbook for understanding the DOCTRINE of the church.

It is also interesting to note that the order of the letters to the churches in the New Testament follow the prescription laid down in 2 Timothy 3:16, that all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for:

- DOCTRINE – Romans (the New Testament Book on Christian doctrine.)
- REPROOF – 1 and 2 Corinthians (Books that reprove sin.)
- CORRECTION – Galatians (A Book specifically written to correct false doctrine.)
- INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians (Books teaching righteous living based on sound doctrine.)

The Apostle God used to write this epistle (letter) is identified in the first word of the first verse of the first chapter of the Book. It was written by Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15), as were all of the letters to the churches. Paul was uniquely qualified to be the one God chose to write the Book of Romans in that he was born a Jew (Acts 21:39; 22:3), was completely familiar with Greek culture (Acts 21:37), and was a possessor of Roman citizenship. (Acts 16:37; 22:25; 23:37)

It is important to note that though God chose to use Paul to write this epistle to the Romans, Paul himself had never actually been to Rome. He had a passion within him to get there to minister to the believers, but somehow in God's sovereignty, by the time of the writing of this letter, He had not allowed it. In Paul's introduction in chapter one, he feels compelled to let the Romans (and us!) know that. He writes, "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles." (1:9-13)

I don't know how your mind works, but when you read verses like that, don't you just have to ask, why wouldn't God let Paul get to Rome sooner? I mean, if he's the Apostle to the Gentiles, why wouldn't God allow him to go and minister there to his heart's content? And don't you think Paul had that very same question? But then, think about it. Do you realize that most of the believers to which God would use the Apostle Paul to establish in Christian doctrine (1:11), would be people just like the Romans, who had never and would never see Paul face to face? What actually happens through the Book of Romans then, is God uses His ministry through Paul to accomplish the same purposes in us that He did in the believers in Rome in the first century! It's a very subtle reminder that when we have a passion for a good thing that God doesn't bring to pass, it's most likely because He is serving a much more grand and glorious purpose! In this case, if Paul would have gotten to Rome on his time schedule, we wouldn't have the Book of Romans in our possession today!

Following the introduction in 1:1-15, Paul then identifies two ways God exhibits His power: First, He demonstrates His RIGHTEOUSNESS to those who receive the gospel by faith. (1:16,17) Second, He demonstrates His WRATH to those who reject His truth by ungodliness. (1:18, 21) In the remainder of chapter one, Paul catalogs the sins of the Gentiles, beginning with their rejection of His glory (1:21-23)—which resulted in their perversion physically (1:24-25), emotionally (1:26-27), and mentally (1:28-32).

Having proven the ungodliness of the Gentiles (HEATHEN) in chapter one, he then turns the spotlight on the sins of the HYPOCRITES in 2:1-16, and the sins of the HEBREWS in 2:17-29. He begins chapter two by showing the hypocrites the inexcusableness of their behavior. (2:1-4) Anticipating their objections, Paul informs them of an inescapable appointment they have with God's judgment. (2:5-16) He concludes the chapter by exposing the unreliable confidence the Jews place in the law (2:17, 24) and in the unprofitable ritual of circumcision. (2:25-29)

In chapter three, Paul reaches the conclusion to which he has been moving since chapter one, verse 18. The conclusion is identified in 3:9: "For we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all UNDER SIN." In other words, whether you're a HEATHEN (1:21-32), a HYPOCRITE (2:1-16), or a HEBREW (2:17-29), the scriptures conclude that "there is none righteous, no, not one!" (3:10) You see, Paul realizes that before someone receives the "good news" of the gospel, they must acknowledge the "bad news" of their sinfulness. So chapter three begins by proving all of humanity's condemnation before God (3:1-20), and concludes by manifesting the availability of righteousness to all who choose to receive it. (3:21-31) Take note of the fact that God's righteousness is offered with three conditions:

- It must be received apart from the law. (3:21)
- It is only available through Christ. (3:22-26)
- It can only be accepted by faith. (3:21-31)

Note some key facts and figures about the Book of Romans:

- Approximate date of writing: 60 A.D.
- Key Verse: Romans 1:16, 17
- Key Word: "Righteousness." Appears 39 times
- Christ is seen as OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Romans 3:23, 24)
- Chapters: 16
- Verses: 433
- Words: 9,477

Here is a simple outline to guide us through the Book:

- The Revelation of Righteousness In The Gospel
- The Righteousness Received In Salvation (Chapters 1-8)
- The Righteousness Rejected By The Jews (Chapters 9-11)
- The Righteousness Reproduced In Sanctification (Chapters 12-16)

WEEK 48, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: ROMANS 4 - 8

OVERVIEW:

The righteousness of God received by faith (chapter 4); the revelation of the righteousness of God realized in the soul (chapter 5); the righteousness of God revealed in trials (chapters 6-7) ; the righteousness of God represented as eternal (chapter 8).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we discussed in yesterday's comments, in terms of doctrine, there is not a more important Book in the entire New Testament than the Book of Romans. And in terms of doctrine, God is more than just a little adamant about it! Though the heed and call in "Christian" circles today is to "let go" of doctrine for the sake of so-called "unity," God's clear admonition to His church is to "hold fast" (2 Tim. 1:13) to sound doctrine, so that we can be genuinely unified with everyone else who wraps their hands firmly around the truth of His Word! It is not simply our love that unites us, folks, but our love of the truth! True biblical love always has truth as its basis (See II John 1:1-4 and the usage of the word "truth" five times in these four verses!) It is worth noting that in the epistles Paul wrote to Pastor Timothy and Pastor Titus (i.e. the "pastoral epistles") he mentions doctrine no less than 13 times! (See I Tim. 1:3,10; 4:1,6,16; 5:17; 6:1, 3; II Tim. 3:10; 4:2; Titus 1:9; 2:1,10.) Again, doctrine is what the Book of Romans is all about—not the least of which is the doctrine of salvation! There is no other Book of the Bible that provides more complete teaching on this most important subject than the Book of Romans.

Something else that is important to note as we make our way through this incredible Book is Paul's utilization of questions in presenting his case. Perhaps you picked up on that in yesterday's reading. In yesterday's reading alone (Rom. 1-3), do you realize that Paul asked over 25 questions?! It's almost as if he anticipates the objections a person might raise in response to the truth he's presenting, and takes away their argument before they can even get there. It is a masterful teaching technique that the Spirit of God uniquely gifted Paul to employ. Pay close attention to this technique as we make our way through the remainder of this Book.

As we move into chapter 4 today, it is important to note a very significant transition that is being made. Whereas chapters 1-3 focused on the fact that God's righteousness is REQUIRED BY SINNERS, chapter 4 focuses on the fact that God's righteousness is RECEIVED BY FAITH. Whereas chapters 1- 3 focused on the "WHAT," chapter 4 focuses on the "HOW."

In 4:1-8, Paul introduces us to the REWARD of righteousness by faith, namely that we are "justified." To be justified means to be rendered righteous. It may be trite for some, but a great way to remember the truth encompassed in the word "justified," is that it means, "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned. As an illustration, Paul reaches back into the Old Testament to the life of Abraham to point to one who was justified by faith.(4:1-8). Then, Paul reveals three truths concerning how it is that justification is actually reckoned to us:

- It is not by circumcision. (4:9-12)
- It is not by the law. (4:13-15)

- It is only by grace through faith. (4:16-22)

The chapter closes with the promise that just as God imputed righteousness to Abraham because of his faith, He, likewise, imputes righteousness to each of us who receive the gospel by faith.

Having laid down the reality that the righteousness God demands is not an ACHIEVED RIGHTEOUSNESS, but a RECEIVED RIGHTEOUSNESS (that is, a righteousness that is not of WORKS, but by FAITH), Paul then moves in chapter 5 to lay out the fact that because we didn't do anything to EARN our salvation (our righteousness), there is also nothing we can do to LOSE it! The doctrine of the eternal security of the believer (one of the most controversial doctrines in Christianity!) is firmly established in the Book of Romans, particularly in chapter 5.

This chapter can be divided into two sections.

The 1st section (5:1-10), identifies the BENEFIT of justification by faith: SECURITY.

The 2nd section (5:11-21), identifies the BASIS for justification by faith: ATONEMENT.

As we move into chapters 6-8, notice other transitions that are also being made:

Chapters 1-5 teach us about JUSTIFICATION by faith.

Chapters 6-8 teach us about SANCTIFICATION by the Spirit.

Chapters 1-5 identify how God saved us from the PENALTY of sin.

Chapters 6-8 identify how Christ saved us from the POWER of sin.

Chapters 1-5 show us the GATEWAY to the Christian life.

Chapters 6-8 show us the PATHWAY of the Christian life.

While there is a significant CONTRAST between Romans 1-5 and 6-8, there is an equally significant CONNECTION between Romans 6, 7 and 8. The connection between these three chapters is linked to a little phrase found in Romans 5:17: "reign in life." Notice that Paul does not fully explain (in this verse) HOW those who have been justified by faith in Christ shall "reign in life." The full explanation comes in Romans 6, 7 and 8.

Check it out...

- Romans 6 explains how the believer can reign in life because SIN no longer REIGNS over us. (6:12)
- Romans 7 explains how the believer can reign in life because the LAW no longer has DOMINION over us. (7:1,4)
- Romans 8 explains how the believer can reign in life because the SPIRIT now gives LIFE and LIBERTY to us. (8:2,4)

WEEK 48, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: ROMANS 9-11

OVERVIEW:

The revelation of the righteousness of God rejected in Judaism (chapters 9-11).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Today we move into the second half of this great doctrinal epistle of the Apostle Paul. Keep in mind that the purpose of the writing of Romans is to reveal the righteousness of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.(1:16-17) In the first half of Romans (Chapters 1–8), Paul identified a number of PRINCIPLES related to the righteousness we receive through the gospel:

- Sin is a universal reality. (Chapters 1-3)
- Salvation is a free gift. (Chapter 3)
- Salvation is received by faith. (Chapter 4)
- Salvation is secure and forever. (Chapter 5)
- Sanctification is from sin and the law. (Chapters 6-7)
- Sanctification is by the Spirit. (Chapter 8)

But beginning in chapter 9, Paul turns his attention to some of the PROBLEMS related to the righteousness we receive through the gospel—particularly, problems that relate to the Jews.

The first problem had to do with the fact that at the time Paul wrote the Book of Romans, the Old Testament sacrifices were still being offered in the Temple at Jerusalem. The principles Paul laid out in Romans 1-8 have rendered those sacrifices completely MEANINGLESS.

The second problem was related to the reality that each time Paul preached in a Jewish synagogue, he knew that Judaism and Christianity could not co-exist. If Christianity continued to spread across the world, Judaism's fate was sealed. It was just that reality that caused Paul to so bitterly oppose Christianity prior to his conversion.

Finally, the greatest problem Paul faced was reconciling in people's minds the doctrines of the church with the covenants God had made to the Nation of Israel. The two questions that continually surfaced each time Paul preached in the presence of Jews were: "Are the promises of God to the Nation of Israel now null and void?" and "Where does the Jew stand in relationship to God in this dispensation?" The purpose of Romans 9, 10 and 11 is to provide answers to those questions. The Spirit of God obviously knew that these answers would blast Satan's attempts to pervert the gospel with the false teachings of the Judiazers (those who were zealous for Judaism).

Some have called chapters 9, 10 and 11 a parenthesis in the Book of Romans. A parenthesis is defined as a sentence or paragraph that provides the reader with an explanation. That's exactly what Romans 9, 10 and 11 do! They provide us with an explanation of how it is that God could set aside His chosen people for a period of time, and how it is that God will restore Israel at a future date, and fulfill all the promises He made to them in the Old Testament.

The three chapters of this parenthesis can be broken down as follows:

- In Romans 9, the emphasis is on Israel's PAST ELECTION.
- In Romans 10, the emphasis is on Israel's PRESENT REJECTION.

- In Romans 11, the emphasis is on Israel's FUTURE RESTORATION.

A couple of other side notes:

Don't let Paul's statement in Romans 9:13 freak you out: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." The "as it is written" lets us know that Paul is quoting an Old Testament reference. He is quoting Malachi 1:2-3, where this statement is made in reference to NATIONS, not INDIVIDUALS! "Esau" is representative of the Edomite nation. "Jacob" is representative of the Nation of Israel. Because of John 3:16 and countless other Scriptures, there is no way that the Bible teaches that God loves some sinners, and hates others.

Concerning the hardening of Pharaoh in 9:17-18, understand that God always gives people exactly what they want. If we want truth, God will give us truth. If we want a lie, God will give us a lie. Exodus 8:15 says that Pharaoh hardened his heart. Then in Exodus 9:12, it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. The fact is, God simply gave Pharaoh what he wanted. It is the same principle that is repeated in 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12. This passage identifies people who have understood the truth and have had the opportunity to receive the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved (2:10), but rather than receive the truth, they "had pleasure in unrighteousness," (2:12) and, therefore, lied to themselves, and rejected the truth. The passage teaches that in the Tribulation Period when the Antichrist comes on the scene, God will say in effect, "You wanted a lie—so that's exactly what you'll get!" Verses 11 and 12 say that God Himself will "send them strong delusion" so that they will believe the lie of the Antichrist, and be forever damned.

In Pharaoh's case, GOD hardened Pharaoh's heart because PHARAOH hardened Pharaoh's heart! With those who miss the rapture because they lied to themselves when God presented them the truth, God will simply give them what they proved they wanted.

We might do well to ask ourselves today, "Is there anything I'm saying to God by the message my life is communicating to Him that I want—that I don't really want Him to give me?"

WEEK 48, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: ROMANS 12-16

OVERVIEW:

The revelation of the righteousness of God reproduced in the church (chapters 12-16).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

After introducing the theme of the Book of Romans, the revelation of the righteousness of God in the gospel of Christ (1:16,17), Paul walked us through eight chapters of PRINCIPLES related to that gospel. Then, beginning in chapter 9 and continuing through chapter 11, Paul identified and addressed the PROBLEMS of the gospel as they related to the Nation of Israel. We called this section a "parenthesis, " because if you were to read from Romans 8:39 right into 12:1, it would make perfect sense! Check it out...

Paul says in Romans 8:38–39, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (12:1) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Now beginning with Romans 12:1, we move into the third and final section of this great epistle. Having considered the PRINCIPLES and PROBLEMS of the gospel in the first 11 chapters, in these final five chapters (12-16), Paul takes us into an examination of the PRACTICE of the gospel. What he does in these chapters is a classic Pauline pattern that we will be able to observe in all of his writings.

In each of the New Testament letters God inspired Paul to write, he always establishes the specific DOCTRINES in the beginning of the Book. Each letter then concludes by providing the reader with a series of practical DUTIES which are based upon the DOCTRINES he's presented. Paul was aware of the danger in laying down PRINCIPLES without identifying how those PRINCIPLES were to affect the PRACTICE of our lives. (i.e. Receiving INFORMATION with no regard for TRANSFORMATION!) As Bible-believers, we must understand that DOCTRINE and DUTIES always go hand-in-hand. Each time we approach the Word of God, we must ask ourselves two very simple questions: "What is it that God wants me to BELIEVE?" and "How is it that God wants me to BEHAVE?" You see this pattern established very clearly in the Book of Romans. For the first eight chapters Paul identifies the DOCTRINAL PRINCIPLES related to the gospel; then in the final five chapters, he provides the PRACTICAL DUTIES based upon those principles.

Beginning in chapter 12 and continuing through chapter 14, Paul identifies the following relationships that have been dramatically affected by receiving the gospel. With each RELATIONSHIP he provides a corresponding RESPONSIBILITY:

- Our relationship to God... Offer reasonable service. (12:1-2)
- Our relationship to other believers...Minister our gifts. (12:3-16)
- Our relationship to our enemies...Overcome evil, with good. (12:17-21)

- Our relationship to rulers...Be subject (submissive). (13:1-7)
- Our relationship to our neighbors...Owe nothing but love. (13:8-14)
- Our relationship to weaker believers...Receive and edify. (14:1-23)

Realizing the benefit of an example when transitioning from theory to practice, in chapter 15, Paul provides three examples of people who ministered to others: He begins with the ministry of Christ and how He pleased and received others. (15:1-13) Next, he provides himself as an example of one that forwarded God's message. (15:14). Finally, he holds up the Gentile churches and their sacrificial giving to the impoverished believers at Jerusalem as an example. (15:25-35)

In chapter 16, God finds an incredible way to teach us about the important keys to Paul's ministry. Paul sends his greetings to 26 individuals, two households, and several churches that are meeting in people's homes. That's a lot of relationships, considering these people reside in a city that Paul's not yet been permitted to visit! As we read this list, we can't help but be impressed with the fact that Paul loved people. No doubt, many of these names represented people he had personally won to Christ in other cities, who now resided in Rome. It is more than apparent that Paul's ministry centered around two key things: the GREAT COMMANDMENT (Loving God and loving people), and the GREAT COMMISSION (Reproducing reproducers — i.e. Making disciples!) May each of our ministries reflect the same.

WEEK 48, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 1-6

OVERVIEW:

An appeal for unity (chapter 1); the wisdom of God vs. the wisdom of this world (chapter 2); eternal building vs. temporary building (chapter 3); understanding our stewardship (chapter 4); dealing with unrepentant sin (chapter 5); dealing with conflict in the body (chapter 6).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

(The city of Corinth was located on one of the most important east-west trade and travel routes in the Roman Empire. It was a financial center especially noted for commerce, culture, and absolute perverted corruption. Corinth was also the headquarters for the worship of Venus and for some of the mystery cults from Egypt and Asia. It was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire.

The founding of the church at Corinth is detailed in Acts 18:1-17. The apostle Paul and his missionary team established this church—and Paul actually spent a year and half teaching and preaching in it. Yet, by the time Paul writes this letter, the church was totally operating in the flesh. In fact, Paul finds absolutely nothing for which to commend them in this entire letter! There is NOTHING this church was doing that should be used as a model in our church—or any church! They were completely messed up in their relationships with each other, their attitude toward sin, their approach to marriage, their liberty in Christ, the Lord's Supper, exercising their spiritual gifts, and of all things—their belief in the resurrection! Surprisingly enough, even though there are no positive characteristics in this church worth emulating, there is actually an entire movement (the Charismatic Movement)—that bases many of their beliefs and practices on things the Corinthian church espoused!

However, there were bigger problems in this church than just their abuse of spiritual gifts. In fact, God chose to not even address their abuse of the gifts until the end of the Book (Chapters 12–14). The biggest problem this church was facing was the problem of DIVISION! Paul basically takes the entire first four chapters to address this cancer that often attacks the Body of Christ. The fact that Paul addresses this subject first and more thoroughly than any of the other issues facing this church should speak volumes to us about how God feels about UNITY in His church—and what issue we need to be most concerned about in our own local church. Personally I'd rather partner for the cause of Christ with a genuine brother who mistakenly believes tongues are still for today, than to partner with a brother that uses his tongue to cause division in the local church! (See Pro. 6:16–19)

One of the most interesting things to note about this letter written to address so many sinful issues in the church is how many times God uses Paul to clear off a spot to speak directly to the pastors or elders of the church. We all certainly know, as the old saying goes, that "everything rises or falls on leadership," so surely it would be a quick fix to the problems in this church if Paul could just get the pastors to do their job—and exercise their spiritual authority and leadership, right? But do you know how many times Paul actually addresses the pastors of the church at Corinth in this letter? ZERO!

Now, does that mean that pastors don't have a key responsibility in the leadership of the church, as well as the overall spiritual climate of the church? Absolutely not! It simply reveals the fact that in the Body of Christ, we're all in this thing together! All of us together are the Body of Christ! Make no mistake, a pastor will most certainly give an account to God for how he led God's people and how he provided oversight of the church. (Heb. 13:17) However, each person will give an account for himself at the Judgment Seat of Christ! (Rom. 14:12) In that day, none of us will be able to say, "Well, if my pastor would have just led/taught/preached/visited/prayed or "whatevered" better, or more than he did—I would have been different." No, the lesson from the Book of 1 Corinthians is that whether a church is operating in the flesh or in the Spirit, it is operating the way it is because of the members of the Body, not just a select few, and all of us need to shoulder the responsibility for our local church functioning according to the Word of God! Each of us need to constantly be examining and judging our own lives—and what we're actually contributing or not contributing to our own local church.

The Corinthians had written to Paul asking several questions they wanted Paul to address. (7:1) However, before Paul begins to answer those questions (beginning in chapter 7), there were other issues that the Spirit of God knew needed to be covered first. We have already mentioned the problem of division in the church that Paul dealt with in chapters 1–4. Many things are addressed in these first four chapters, but they ultimately all come back to the issue of a UNIFIED body versus a DIVIDED body. Chapter 1 and verse 10 is the clear statement of God's will for unity in His church. It's simply this: "Be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment!"

In chapter 5, Paul confronts the Corinthians about the fact that there was a man in their church that was involved in sexual sin with his father's wife, nonetheless! (The way Paul words it, it is obviously his stepmother.) Rather than such a grotesque sin causing the Corinthian's to be appalled—and even to mourn over how such an atrocity detracted from the glory of Christ in His church—they were actually bragging about it! It's difficult enough to even fathom the depth and perversion of this man's sin, much less to fathom the churches perverted reaction to it! Paul is so incensed by it, he tells them that he has already passed judgment upon the man, and instructs the Corinthian's on how they are to pass judgment upon him in a biblical manner as well. It's interesting, in chapter 4, the Corinthian's were casting judgment on people they SHOULD'N'T. In chapter 5, they were failing to cast biblical judgment on those they SHOULD!

In chapter 6, Paul confronts the Corinthians on the fact that they were actually even taking others within their own local Body to court and suing them! Later in the chapter, he addresses other instances of sexual sin that were taking place by those in the church who professed to know Christ!

Listen folks, this was one messed church! And as we'll find in our reading over the next several days, we've really just begun to scratch the surface of their carnality! But all of this ugliness brings up something that is very beautiful and important for us to see. Notice, that before Paul begins to address the sin problems in this church (which actually begins in chapter 1 and verse 10), he takes the first nine verses to greet them. What is absolutely astounding in this passage is the words Paul uses to describe the people in this incredibly carnal and sinful church. Check this out...

In verse 2 of chapter 1, Paul refers to the Corinthians as "them that are SANCTIFIED (or holy!) in Christ Jesus." In verse 8 he says of them, that the Lord Jesus Christ will "CONFIRM you unto the end that you may be BLAMELESS in

the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." In verse 9, he refers to them as those who "were CALLED unto the fellowship of his (God's) Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

Wow! How could Paul possibly refer to such a sinful group of people as this—using such commendable terms as that?! Really? I mean, in light of the horrific things we've already discussed that they had allowed into their lives personally and into their church corporately, how could they possibly be referred to as "sanctified... blameless... confirmed and called?" There is only one reason, my friend—and it is the fact that in verse 2, he says that the Corinthian's were "in Christ!" Listen, that little phrase encompasses and encapsulates one of the most incredible spiritual realities in the entire New Testament! Because you see, the moment we called on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to save us, we were placed "IN CHRIST! As we will see in Ephesians 1:4 in next week's reading, God the Father chose that to be our standing (position) before the foundation of the world, and He did it for the simple fact that it was His desire for us to constantly be "holy and without blame before Him in love." And listen, the only way that could ever happen (and I do mean ever!), is for God to see US—the way He sees His SON! And that's exactly what it means for us to be "in Christ!" When God saved us, the Spirit of God "baptized" us INTO CHRIST... Or, "placed us into" Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), and then He sealed us with His Holy Spirit to guarantee that we will remain "IN CHRIST," until what Ephesians 4:30 calls, "the day of redemption." That means, we will be sealed all the way to the Rapture, which is "the day" our BODY will be "redeemed"—making it a glorified body, which is a body that is incapable of sinning!

You might be thinking, "But how can God see me as 'holy and without blame before him in love,' when the reality is —there are times when I am anything but 'holy'... and I have plenty for which I can be 'blamed'... and I'm certainly not worthy of His 'love?'" The answer is this: the spiritual reality of being "in Christ" is what we often refer to as a POSITIONAL truth. That means that it is a spiritual placement, or a spiritual position that we have received from God, that remains constant regardless of our spiritual PRACTICE—because it is based on Christ's merits, not our own. You see, this is why Paul refers to these carnal and sinful believers in Corinth as "holy" and "unblamable!" It was because of their POSITION "in Christ," certainly not because of the actual PRACTICE of their lives! But don't miss this...

What Paul constantly does throughout his writings in the New Testament is teach us who we are "in Christ," or, "in our POSITION"—and then he sets before us the spiritual goal of seeing our PRACTICE (the actual living of our lives) match our POSITION (who God made us "in Christ")! That is really the entire essence of the Christian life—becoming in our PRACTICE who God made us in our POSITION the day He saved us!

Oh, my brothers and sisters, may that become our goal today... and every day—until we receive a glorified body "like unto His (Christ's) glorious body." (Phil. 3:21)