

Historical Jesus 1: Sources for Jesus' Life

Reasons to Study Jesus:

- 1/3 of earth's population believes in Jesus (2.2 billion)¹
- 71% of Americans are Christians in 2014²
- His life and teachings have massively influenced civilization
- Non-followers even like him
- He offers forgiveness from sin, a way of living full of meaning, and, ultimately, eternal life

My objectives for this class are to help you understand Jesus, teach you to follow Jesus, and inspire you to love Jesus.

Non-Christian Sources about the Life of Jesus:

- AD 93: Flavius Josephus (Jewish Historian)
"Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or some of his companions]; and, when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned" (Antiquities of the Jews 20.9.1)
- AD 93: Flavius Josephus (Jewish Historian)
"About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared." (Antiquities of the Jews 18.3.3)
- AD 111: Pliny the Younger (Governor of Bithynia)
"Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome." (Letters 10.96)
- AD 115: Tacitus (Roman Historian)
"Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind." (Annals 15.44)

Best Sources Are the Four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)

- Unusual Books
 - o Written in ancient Greek language
 - o Survived thousands of years
 - o A ridiculous number of translations
- Manuscripts
 - o Gap between autograph and extant copies
 - o Number of copies to compare with one another

¹ pew research center 2010 report: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>

² pew research center 2014 report: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

- Aramaisms
 - o *Talitha cumi* (Mk 5:41), *ephphatha* (Mk 7:34), Golgotha (Mk 15:22), *Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani* (Mk 15:34), Kephias for Peter (Jn 1:42)
- Names Associated with Eye-Witness Testimony³
 - o Mk 15:21 "And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross."
- Lack of Motivation to Make Up Gospels
 - o The Gospels weren't "best sellers" in the beginning; no one got rich or gained power
 - o In fact, the Gospels caused persecution: first from the Jews then the Romans
- Unflattering Honesty
 - o Jesus' family thought he was crazy (Mk 3:21; Jn 7:5)
 - o Jesus couldn't perform many miracles in Nazareth (Mk 6:5)
 - o The disciples often don't understand or believe (Mk 8:32-33; 10:35-37; 14:37-40, 50)
 - o Peter rebuked Jesus and got called Satan (Mk 8:32-33)
 - o Peter denied Jesus (Mk 14:67-72)
 - o The Romans crucified Jesus (Mk 15:24)
- Lack of Later Controversies Injected into Gospels
 - o Nothing about working Gentiles and Jews into a single congregation
 - o Nothing about speaking in tongues, proper communion, role of women, etc.
- Archeological Corroboration
 - o Places: Jerusalem, Capernaum, Bethsaida, Samaria, Galilee, etc.
 - o Coins: denarius, shekel, half-shekel, lepton
 - o 1941 Ossuary found in Kidron area of Jerusalem "Alexander the Cyrene, son of Simon" (Mk 15:21)
 - o 1961 Pilate stone: in Caesarea Maritima found dedication stone to Tiberius by Pontius Pilate Prefect of Judea
 - o 1968 Yehohanan: crucified man, broken legs, buried in tomb not mass grave, with spike still in his heel (must've hit a knot)
 - o 1986 Galilean fishing boat: discovered at north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee (27ft by 7.5 ft) appeared during a drought; it could fit 13 men
 - o 1990 Caiaphas ossuary: found Joseph bar Caiaphas, high priest who orchestrated Jesus' crucifixion (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.4.3 makes reference to "Joseph, who was also called Caiaphas, of the high priesthood")
 - o 2002 James ossuary: inscribed with the words "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." After a 7 year trial, Israeli courts failed to prove the inscription was a forgery
 - o 2004 Pool of Siloam: discovered two ancient steps while repairing broken sewage pipe. After excavation, they found the steps lead to a massive pool.
- Internal Evidence
 - o Luke 1:1-4
 1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.⁴
 - o 2 Peter 1:16-21
 16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we

³ For a full treatment on this, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

⁴ See also Luke's precision in Luke 3:1-2: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness."

were with him on the holy mountain. 19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.⁵

- John 19:34-35

34 But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. 35 He who saw it has borne witness-- his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth-- that you also may believe.

- John 21:21-24

21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" 22 Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" 23 So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" 24 This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

- Changed Lives

- Countless people have testified to how God irreversibly saved them from destructiveness as a result of encountering the Jesus of the Gospels

- Faith

- Ultimately, you have to decide if you will put your trust in the Gospels

⁵ According to Papias, writing in AD 130, Mark was Peter's interpreter who wrote down Peter's Gospel. See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39

Historical Jesus 2: Birth of the Messiah

"Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander the Great, Caesar, Mohamed, and Napoleon; without science and learning, he shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of school, he spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, he set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times." — Philip Schaff

We have four primary sources

1. Mark: action focused, quick overview, very few teachings
2. Matthew: focused on convincing practicing Jews that Jesus is Messiah
3. Luke: focused on explaining Christianity to Gentiles
4. John: focused on Jesus' self-understanding as God's sent Son

God made promises to Abraham and David that will help you understand the birth of Christ much better.

Genesis 17:4-8: God's Promises to Abraham

4 "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

Promises to Abraham

1. You will be father of a multitude of nations
2. Kings will come from you
3. I will be God to you and your offspring
4. I will give you and your offspring the land of Canaan

2 Samuel 7:12-16: God's Promises to David

12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."

Promises to David

1. God will establish kingdom of David's son forever
2. David's son will build a house for God's name
3. I will be a father to him; he will be a son to me
4. When he goes wrong, I will discipline him, but not take my steadfast love from him

Matthew 1:1

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham

This is a bold statement:

1. Christ = Messiah = Anointed King
2. Son of David = the one God promised to establish his throne forever
3. Son of Abraham = the descendant to restore land to Israel

What follows in the first chapter of Matthew is a genealogy or list of ancestors, proving that Jesus is a qualified king going back to David and Abraham.

Luke 1:31-33

31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

The name "Jesus" means "Yahweh Is Salvation." It was very common in the first century (like Joshua is for us today). To distinguish Jesus from other Jesuses, people commonly called him "Jesus of Nazareth" or "Jesus the Nazarene."⁶ Where this prophecy gets interesting is when he is called "the son of the Most High" and the angel says God will give him David's throne. This is not just another Jesus or even another Davidic king. This is the one destined to rule over the kingdom of Israel forever!

Luke 1:34-35

34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy-- the Son of God.

With Jesus, we encounter something totally new. Jesus will not have a human father. God will be his "biological" father. This fulfills God's promise to David that he will be a father to David's son.

Luke 1:38

38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

To her credit, Mary had faith. Regardless of the circumstances, she committed to the prophecy, throwing herself headlong into the care of God.

Matthew 1:18-19

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

Joseph decided to divorce her

- Parents typically arranged marriages
- Engagement was as binding as marriage itself
- Couldn't just return the ring and call it off

Matthew 1:20-25

20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God [is] with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Mary is a great woman of courageous faith

Joseph is a great man of courageous faith

⁶ Though when he is in Nazareth they called him Jesus "the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon" or "the carpenter's son" or "Joseph's son."

- This level of trust is what God wants from you
- Will you be a Mary or a Joseph in your generation?
- Following Christ is not about playing it safe

At this point, ask yourself

- Who will this baby grow up to be?
- What will he do?
- How will he ascend to the throne of David?
- How will he restore the land back to Abraham's descendants?
- How will he save his people from their sins?

Next time, we'll see how the powers that be reacted to this baby Messiah.

Historical Jesus 3: Rulers in Christ's World

Life in the First Century

They had no social media, no internet, no phones, no tablets, no computers, no light bulbs, no electricity, no steel, no plastic, no cars, no trains, no planes, no satellites, no rockets, no gasoline, or no antibiotics. Even so, we must be careful not to fall for the temptation of chronological snobbery. These were not primitive people, incapable of deep thought or great accomplishments. In fact, they had water fountains (aqueducts), underground sewage in large cities, concrete public baths (hot, medium, and cold), libraries, theaters, sports (running, wrestling, boxing, chariot racing), and outdoor markets providing all organic, pesticide –free, locally sourced foods. The rich enjoyed constantly running water, personal baths, heated floors, time to learn the classics, and participation in the politics of the local city.

One of the shocking facts of antiquity is that life expectancy was so low.⁷ The average expected age of death for those born in the Roman Empire was between twenty and thirty years of age. This was due to an exceeding high rate of infant mortality, resulting in one out of three babies dying before their first birthday. Half of their children died by age ten. However, if someone survived until ten, he or she could expect to live to a ripe, old age of forty-seven years. The few who lived to sixty would likely make it to seventy. Consequently, the elderly comprised only seven percent of the population (compared to thirteen percent in America in the early twenty-first century). Life was cheap, and death all too common.

Wealth was concentrated in the hands of a tiny minority who dominated local and imperial politics. Since the middle class was minuscule, most folks lived, worked, and died as peasants, subsisting on what little they could earn without any hope of upward mobility.

The Roman emperors and the Senate, to a lesser extent, ran the empire. Often Rome would work through provincial rulers drawn from the local people, though they frequently also employed their own governors as well. The client ruler's task was to keep the peace and collect the taxes.

Generally, inhabitants of the empire enjoyed freedom of religion due to polytheism. Ancient polytheists believed in many gods, so they weren't concerned that others worshipped different gods than their own. However, for Jews this was a major issue since they could not worship the Roman gods at all. Eventually, they arranged a compromise with the empire. Rather than offering a sacrifice to Caesar, they would offer it to God on behalf of Caesar.

I want to look at three significant rulers during the life of Christ so that you can understand how the world worked in his day. First we will consider Herod the Great, then his son, Herod Antipas, and lastly the Roman governor Pontius Pilate.

Herod the Great: A Man Driven by Fear

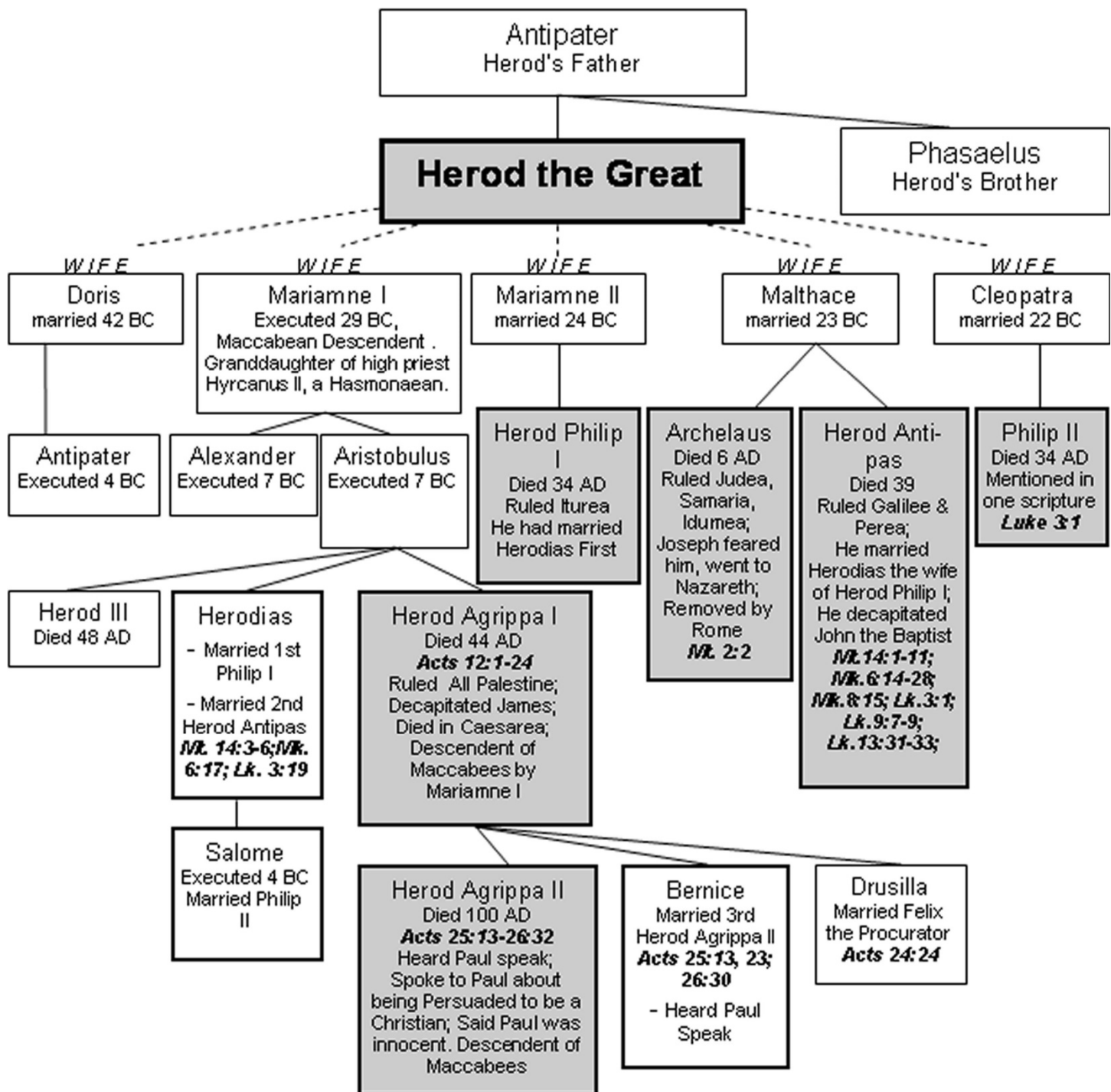
- Herod's father was an Idumean (Edomite) and his mother was a Nabatean (Arab).
- He married Mariamne since she was a Hasmonean princess (granddaughter of Aristobolus II on one side and granddaughter of Hyrcanus II on the other).
- He had constant turmoil in his home as his sister and mother constantly clashed with his wife and her mother, eventually ending in the execution of his beloved wife.
- "But when she was once dead, the king's affections for her were kindled in a more outrageous manner than before, whose old passion for her we have already described; for his love to her was not of a calm

⁷ Karen Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 2-3.

nature, nor such as we usually meet with among other husbands; for at its commencement it was of an enthusiastic kind; nor was it, by their long cohabitation and free conversation together brought under his power to manage; but at this time his love to Mariamne seemed to seize him in such a peculiar manner, as looked like divine vengeance upon him for the taking away of her life; for he would frequently call for her, and frequently lament for her, in a most indecent manner.”⁸

- Herod suspected his sons from Mariamne, Alexander and Aristobulus and eventually convinced a Roman court to execute them.
- One year later wise men from the east came inquiring about “king of the Jews”
 - Mathew 2:1-22
1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: 6 "'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" 7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."
 - Herod became infuriated when the wise men didn't return, so he sent soldiers to Bethlehem and killed all the male children 2 and under
- One year later, he brought his son Antipater to court and requested death penalty from Augustus who agreed. Allegedly, the emperor once quipped, “Better to be Herod's pig than his son.”
- Just before he died, he rounded up all of the leading men of Jerusalem into the hippodrome and ordered them shot with arrows upon news of his death so people would mourn rather than rejoice over his death.
- His will bequeathed his kingdom to his three surviving sons: Herod Archelaus, Herod Philip, and Herod Antipas.
 - Herod Archelaus took over Jerusalem, mismanaged matters so badly that the enraged Jews were able to convince Rome to fire Archelaus and send their own governor instead.
 - Matthew 2:19-22
19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." 21 And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee
 - Herod Philip married Herodias and ruled as tetrarch.
 - Herod Antipas ruled as tetrarch of Galilee

⁸ Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 15.7.6



Herod Antipas: Living to Impress Others

- He petitioned Augustus for sole rule over his brothers but was denied. Instead, he ruled over Galilee and Perea from 4 BC to AD 39. This was nearly all of Jesus' life since he died around AD 30.
- Beyond keeping the taxes coming and keeping the peace, he worked hard to impress the emperors who reigned during his tenure: Augustus, Tiberius, and Caligula.
- For Augustus he rebuilt Sepphoris and renamed it Autocratis (emperor) and after he built a wall around Betharamphtha, he called it Livia (Augustus' wife) and later renamed it Julias (Augustus' daughter).
- For Tiberius he renamed the Sea of Galilee to Lake Tiberias and built a city on its shore called Tiberius.
- When his brother's wife, Herodias, divorced Philip and married him, John the Baptist confronted him.
- He arrested John

- Mark 6:17-20

17 For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.
- He was afraid to kill him
 - Matthew 14:5

And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet.
- Herodias outmaneuvered him
 - Mark 6:22-24

22 For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you." 23 And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." 24 And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist."
- Later, Antipas heard reports about Jesus performing miracles and decided to arrest him.
 - Luke 13:31-32

31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." 32 And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.'
- In the end, he saw Jesus at trial but decided not to get involved, sending him back to Pilate.

Pontius Pilate: Domination via Brute Force

- Pilate governed the province of Judea from AD 26 to 36
- According to Philo, Pilate "was a man of a very inflexible disposition, and very merciless as well as very obstinate."⁹ Philo despised Pilate for "his corruption, and his acts of insolence, and his rapine, and his habit of insulting people, and his cruelty, and his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never ending, and gratuitous, and most grievous inhumanity"¹⁰
- Soon after Pilate took office, he had his legions bring their military standards, but after six days of Jewish protesting, he relented.
- When he used funds from the Temple to build an aqueduct to Jerusalem, another riot broke out. This time he ordered his soldiers to brutally attack the mob.
- One time, Pilate killed some Galileans such that their blood intermingled with that of their sacrifices (Luke 13:1).
- Pilate sat in judgment on Jesus, probably one of many he judged that day. The Gospels show that Pilate remained unconvinced despite the Jewish leaders' insistence that Jesus deserved execution. Eventually he gave in when they threatened to tell Caesar that he wasn't taking sedition seriously.
- Later in his term, Pilate put shields onto Herod's palace in Jerusalem with the name of Tiberius on them. The people sent a petition to Tiberius who ordered them to be removed.
- His time came to an end as a result of a complaint after he slaughtered a group in Samaria who had gathered in a village at the base of Mount Gerizim for following a prophet who said he would show them where Moses had hidden the sacred vessels.

⁹ Embassy to Gaius 301

¹⁰ Embassy to Gaius 302

These three are not the worst Roman rulers, nor were they the best. They were, however, the men in charge of the affairs of the world when Jesus grew up and carried out his ministry. Based on their behavior, we can see they believed in the kind of power expressed through domination, that life was cheap, that they should identify and eliminate threats, achieve advancement through flattery and excessive gift-giving, especially to Caesar, keep the peace at all costs, and tax their subjects aggressively.

Now that we've calibrated our historical lenses to see what was "normal" in Jesus' world, we can appreciate all the more how magnificent and unique he was in against the background of his

Historical Jesus 4: Baptism & Temptations

Baptism: Jesus Is Humble

Matthew 3:1-6 John the Baptist was a wildly successful prophet who preached repentance in light of God's coming Kingdom.

His unusual style was similar to Elijah the prophet who had lived several centuries before him.

2 Kings 1:7-8

7 He said to them, "What kind of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?" 8 They answered him, "He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

The prophet Malachi, one of the last Old Testament prophets predicted Elijah would return before the day of the LORD.

Malachi 4:5-6

5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

John's way of life was very different from Jesus. However, Jesus thought very highly of John the Baptist and believed he fulfilled the Elijah prophecy.

Matthew 11:7-19

7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. 9 What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is he of whom it is written, "'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'" 11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, 14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. 15 He who has ears to hear let him hear. 16 "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, 17 "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'" 18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

Matthew 3:11-17 John preached about the coming judgment of God and urged people to change their lives. People signified their faith in this Kingdom message by submitting to baptism in the Jordan River. Although Jesus did not have sin,¹¹ he still received John's baptism in order to fulfill all righteousness.

Temptations: Jesus Trusts God Totally

¹¹ Jesus can sympathize with our weaknesses because he was tempted in every respect like us, but he never sinned (Hebrews 4:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5).

Satan had tempted Eve with such subtlety, she never recognized what he was doing until it was too late. He asked her, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"¹² Eve replied, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Satan retorted, "You surely will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When she saw it was good for food, a delight to the eyes, and that it would make her wise, she took and ate and gave to her husband and he ate. Satan's temptations made her doubt God's motives and broke her trust in God.

Satan is not some minor mythical creature in Scripture. He is the "god of this age," the one behind the curtain pulling the strings, tainting and corrupting the world with his massive influence.¹³ He is the malevolent force behind Herod, the wickedness infecting Antipas, and the puppet master behind Pilate's brutality. He works tirelessly to spoil and ruin goodness and to twist and bend everything away from God's will.

First Temptation: Turn the Stone into Bread (Matthew 4:1-4)

The devil uses hunger, but his true aim is to break Jesus' trust that he is the Son of God. Either Jesus attempts to turn the stone into bread (if God doesn't back him up, then he'll have major reason to doubt) or doesn't do it, and never knows for sure if he really is the Son of God. Jesus replies with an exceptionally appropriate Scripture quotation.

Deuteronomy 8:2-4

2 And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. 3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. 4 Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years.

For forty years, the people wandered in the desert and had to trust God to provide manna.

Second Temptation: Throw Yourself Down (Matthew 4:5-7)

Here the tempter quotes the Bible himself. Note how adaptable he is. He sees that Jesus has this amazing faith in God and uses that against him. If you really trust him, then jump! Again, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 6:16

"You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah."

Exodus 17:1-7

1 All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and

¹² See Genesis 3:1-6 for the full account. Revelation 12:9 tells us that Satan, the devil, the great dragon, and the ancient serpent are all the same individual.

¹³ Satan is "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4), "the ruler of this world" (John 14:30), "the deceiver of the whole world" (Revelation 12:9), "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2), the one who "has been sinning from the beginning" (1 John 3:8), and the one who "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

our livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." 5 And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

This is precisely the question the devil is maliciously pushing Jesus to ask himself: "Is God with me or not?" If God is with him, then he can jump without a worry in the world. Instead, Jesus shuts the temptation down. As the representative Israelite who now faces the wilderness temptations, he demonstrates radical trust in God and chooses not to put Him to the test.

Excursus: What It Means To Be the "Son of God"

2 Samuel 7:12-14

12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son...

John 20:31

but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Luke 1:32-33

32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Matthew 26:63

But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

Luke 4:41

And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.

John 1:49

Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

John 11:27

She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Third Temptation: Fall Down and Worship Me (Matthew 4:8-11)

Satan here offers to fulfill Jesus' destiny without suffering or death. Jesus can take the easy way out. Surely, he'll be a better ruler than the evil one. He doesn't need to wait; he can have it all now! However, Jesus doesn't give him an inch! A third time, he quotes from Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 6:13-15

13 It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.

14 You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you-- 15 for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God-- lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

N. T. Wright insightfully summarizes these temptations with the following words:

"Jesus responds to the devil, not by attempting to argue (arguing with temptation is often a way of playing with the idea until it becomes too attractive to resist), but by quoting scripture. The passages he draws on come from the story of Israel in the wilderness: he is going to succeed where Israel failed. Physical needs and wants are important, but loyalty to God is more important still. Jesus is indeed to become the world's true lord, but the path to that status, and the mode of it when it arrives, is humble service, not a devilish seeking after status and power. Trust in God doesn't mean acting stupidly to force God into doing a spectacular rescue. The power that Jesus already has, which he will shortly display in healings in particular, is to be used for restoring others to life and strength, not for cheap stunts. His status as God's son commits him, not to showy prestige, but to the strange path of humility, service and finally death. The enemy will return to test this resolve again. For the moment, an initial victory is won, and Jesus can begin his public career knowing that though struggles lie ahead the foe has been beaten on the first field that really matters."¹⁴

¹⁴ N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 44.

Historical Jesus 5: Kingdom Saturated Ministry

To begin, I want to look at three prophecies about the Kingdom of God from the Hebrew Bible:

Daniel 7:13-14, 27

13 "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed... 27 And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.'

Isaiah 35:1-10

1 ...the desert shall rejoice...2 it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing...They shall see the glory of the LORD...4...Behold, your God will come with vengeance...He will come and save you. 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; 6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert... 10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Isaiah 61:1-11

1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3 to grant to those who mourn in Zion-- to give them ...the oil of gladness instead of mourning...4 They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. 5 ...foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers; 6 but you shall be called the priests of the LORD...you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast. 7 ...in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy... 11 For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.

Here is a summary of Kingdom elements:

- God gives Kingdom to the Son of Man
- God's Kingdom encompasses all nations and lasts forever
- God's people receive the Kingdom
- God will heal the land (deserts blossom)
- God will bring vengeance and salvation
- God will heal the people of all ailments

- God's people will sing and rejoice with no more sorrow
- God will comfort, enrich, and bless His people
- God's people will possess the land with everlasting joy

The Kingdom is the age when God sets everything wrong with the world right, when He heals our world, when He judges the wicked and rewards the righteous, and when He restores the world back to the way it was in the beginning. Sadly, many are confused about God's plans for His people, thinking instead that God wants to bring us to heaven. This gets the whole idea upside down. God doesn't want to bring us up to heaven; rather, He wants to bring heaven down to us. He created our world to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18). He's not abandoning it or evacuating it; instead, He's going to rescue it and restore it. It is important to get our understanding about this straight because we cannot understand Jesus without understanding the Kingdom of God.

Let's take a look at Jesus' inaugural sermon in Nazareth, his home town.

Luke 4:13-21

13 And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. 14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. 15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. 16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. 17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus claimed he was fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy about the Kingdom. This was his mission statement. He was claiming to be God's agent to heal the world. From this day forward, his preaching focused on proclaiming God's coming Kingdom from village to village.

Matthew 4:11-17

11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. 12 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. 13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali... 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."...23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

The phrase “kingdom of heaven” means when heaven’s Kingdom comes to earth. It is identical to the Kingdom of God.¹⁵ Not only did Jesus travel about preaching the Kingdom, he also sent his twelve apostles out to preach Kingdom (“proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” Matthew 10:7). Later on, he sent out seventy to preach the same message (“the kingdom of God has come near to you” Luke 10:9). In his teaching about the end-times, he said the end won’t come until “this gospel of the kingdom” is proclaimed through the whole world as testimony (Matthew 24:14). Even after his resurrection, Jesus continued with his disciples for 40 days, “speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

In addition to his gospel preaching, Jesus constantly talked about the Kingdom when teaching how to live. In the Sermon on the Mount, an explanation of how to live now, he couldn’t help but mention the Kingdom eight times. He summarized with the statement, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). Likewise, Jesus used parables to teach about the Kingdom. He would say that the Kingdom was like a mustard seed, or it was like leaven, or it was like a treasure hidden in a field, etc.

However, Jesus’ Kingdom ministry didn’t stop there. He enacted the Kingdom through his healing ministry. We can see this clearly in Luke 7. After he heals the widow of Nain’s son, John sends disciples to ask Jesus if he is the expected one. When they arrive, Jesus is in the act of healing many from diseases, plagues, evil spirits, and blindness. Jesus replied: “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me” (Luke 7:22-23). This statement includes quotations from both Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 61. John wants to know whether or not Jesus is the Messiah—the one to usher in the Kingdom age. Jesus responds by pointing to his Kingdom miracles. If someone wants to know what the Kingdom will be like, all he or she needs to do is look at Jesus in action. Jesus’ ministry gave people a taste of the coming Kingdom.

Jesus also understood his exorcisms in light of the Kingdom. He said, “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28). It was as if the future age was breaking into the present through Jesus’ ministry. When the Kingdom arrives, will people suffer from demonic possession? Of course not! So, Jesus shows what it will be like.

Lastly, Jesus preferred a particular title, “Son of Man,” for himself above all of the others. This term can simply mean a “human being” or it may refer to the one Daniel saw in his vision—the one destined to receive the Kingdom from the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:13-14). “Son of Man” is perfectly ambiguous; it forces people to make their own decision about Jesus. Even so, its distinctive Kingdom flavor was behind why Jesus preferred it so much. He is a son of man to be

¹⁵ Matthew is the only one who uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven” in the Bible. Everywhere else, it is “kingdom of God.” We can see that Matthew thinks of “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” interchangeably by comparing Matthew 19:23 with 19:24. In v23, he uses “kingdom of heaven” and in v24, “kingdom of God.”

sure, but he's also the Son of Man—the one will rule over all peoples, nations, and languages whose Kingdom will last forever, not pass away, nor ever be destroyed.

Next, we'll look at Jesus the rabbi.

Historical Jesus 6: Rabbi Jesus

The World of Torah

The people of Jesus' time cared a great deal about the Bible.¹⁶ That is not say that they could all read, but it does mean that the Bible dominated their oral culture. Living at that time, God's people adhered to the Torah. This term can either refer to the instruction¹⁷ God gave Moses on how He wants His people to live in the land or the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Far from thinking of God's law as an impossible ideal they could never live up to, the Israelites regarded it as a superior way of life that God had graciously given His people. Here is how one psalm speaks of Torah:

Psalm 119:10-16

11 I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you...16 I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word...47 for I find my delight in your commandments, which I love. 48 I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes...72 The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces...93 I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life. 94 I am yours; save me, for I have sought your precepts...97 Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day...103 How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!...136 My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law...162 I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil. 163 I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law. 164 Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules...167 My soul keeps your testimonies; I love them exceedingly.

Rabbis

When we read about Jesus in the Gospels, he often explains his take on a Scripture and discusses other interpretations with his peers. This was a long established tradition for rabbis. Here are two examples.

Example #1: Summarize the Law

- "On another occasion it happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, 'Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.' Thereupon he repulsed him with the builder's cubit which was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, he said to him, 'What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbour: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it.'"¹⁸
- Compare this to Jesus' way of saying it: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

Example #2: Reason for Divorce

- "Beth Shammai say: a man should not divorce his wife unless he has found her guilty of some unseemly conduct, as it says, because he hath found some unseemly thing in her. Beth Hillel, however, say [that he may divorce her] even if she has merely spoilt his food, since it says,

¹⁶ Their Bible is what we call the Old Testament today.

¹⁷ Torah is often translated "law," but this is probably too limiting. The Torah in fact was not merely a set of laws to follow but a whole way living and relating to God.

¹⁸ Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Shabbath, Folio 31a

because he hath found some unseemly thing in her. R. Akiba says, [he may divorce her] even if he finds another woman more beautiful than she is, as it says, it cometh to pass, if she find no favor in his eyes.”¹⁹

- Compare this to Jesus’ understanding: “And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9).

People generally recognized Jesus as a rabbi.

John 1:37-38

37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38 Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"

In addition to these two, Nicodemus (John 3:2), a blind man (Mark 10:51), the crowd (John 6:25), and, of course, his own disciples (Mark 9:5) called him rabbi.

Rabbi Jesus’ Teachings

Jesus was simple, yet profound. In his hometown, they asked, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son?” (Matthew 13:54-55). In Jerusalem, they marveled, saying, “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?” (John 7:15-16). He spoke to common folks and educated thinkers alike.

Living in light of the Kingdom was very important to Jesus as we discussed last time (Matthew 6:31-33).

What he said was often paradoxical. For example, he said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:10), “But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mark 10:31), and “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39).

At times, his teachings were counter-cultural. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, he went against standard interpretations of the Law. He said, “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all” (Matthew 5:33-35). He also said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43-44).

Oddly, this rabbi spent a good deal of time with sinners and social outcasts (Luke 5:30-35). When asked why he ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus replied, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Lk 5:31).

He often illustrated his sermons, using elements from his environment. One time his disciples argued about who was the greatest (Mark 9:33-37). Jesus took a child and put him in the midst of them to teach them about humility. Once, he cursed a fig tree, causing it to wither to teach them about faith.

Additionally, he liked to tell parables for a variety of reasons. Parables are short, memorable, fictional stories illustrating a behavior or truth. When he told them to the crowds, he used them to hide the

¹⁹ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Gittin, Folio 90a

truth from those who did not have ears to hear (Mark 4:9-12).²⁰ When he told them to his disciples, he used them to explain something.²¹ When he told them to his enemies, he used them to convict and reprove them.²²

In his teaching ministry, Jesus did not shut himself behind closed doors or limit his communication to the most capable of his disciples. People were always coming to him; among them were the rich, poor, sick, outcasts, other teachers, and even foreigners. They were drawn to him. One time, parents brought their children to him to bless them, and his disciples rebuked them (Mark 10:13-16). Jesus became indignant and said, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14). Then he took them in his arms and blessed them.

Naturally, Rabbi Jesus also taught his students how to pray. He warned them not to pray like hypocrites who love to stand in synagogues and on street corners to be seen by others. He instructed them to pray in an inner room to their Father in secret. Furthermore, they should not repeat prayers mindlessly but should persist like a wronged widow before an apathetic judge. He taught them this prayer:

Matthew 6:9-13

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."²³

Jesus was not a radical, setting out to start a new world religion. He completely accepted the Hebrew understanding of God that his fellow Jews held.

Mark 12:28-34

28 And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32 And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. 33 And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34 And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Jesus knew his Father was greater than he (John 14:28), that he could do nothing on his own (John 5:19), and that his goal was to do the will of his Father who sent him (John 5:30). He believed in Yahweh, the Creator of the universe who rescued His people out of Egypt and gave them the promised land. He taught that God was one and that we should love Him with everything. Next to that, we also ought to love our neighbors as ourselves.

²⁰ e.g. the sower and the seed

²¹ e.g. the wise man and the foolish man building houses

²² e.g. the good Samaritan, the prodigal son

²³ The typical ending, "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." is a later addition to Matthew, not appearing in the earliest Greek manuscripts, the old Latin translations, or most of the early church fathers. Although, it probably did not go back to Jesus, it is a wonderful ending to the prayer, and I usually use it.

Next time, we'll look at what it means to be a disciple of this rabbi.

Historical Jesus 7: Disciples of Jesus

Having looked at Jesus the rabbi, we are now poised to consider what it means to be his disciple. As it turns out, Jesus spoke quite a bit about what he expected from his followers.

Early in his ministry, Jesus called several men to follow him. We may find a parallel to this in Elijah calling Elisha to be his successor.²⁴ The disciples were an eclectic group including fishermen, a tax-collector, and a zealot.²⁵ In addition to his inner group, quite a number of other men and even women followed him as well, including Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna (Luke 8:1-3).

What It Means To Be a Disciple

At its most basic level, a disciple is a student—someone who learns and adheres to the way of life taught and lived by the rabbi. Jesus emphasized this point when he said, “Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46). Another time he said, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

As we saw last time, the heart of Jesus’ philosophy of life was to love the one God and our neighbors as ourselves, so it should come as no surprise that this is the identifying characteristic of his true disciples. He said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

The rabbi determines what he requires of his disciples, not the other way around. In our time we often get this backwards. We think we can pick and choose what sayings of Jesus will work for us while safely ignoring the rest, but Jesus does not give us that option. He says we must abide in his word; he wants absolute commitment.

The Cost of Discipleship

When Jesus sent the twelve out on their mission to extend his ministry, he gave them detailed instructions (Luke 9:1-6). Jesus, furthermore, knew that persecution would certainly come to his missionaries:

Mat 10:16-25

16 Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. 17 Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, 18 and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. 19 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. 20 For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. 21 Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, 22 and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 23 When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. 24 A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25

²⁴ When Elijah called Elisha, he left everything and even sacrificed his oxen, crippling his ability to make a living, and followed after Elijah immediately (1 Kings 19:19-21).

²⁵ A generation after Christ, the party of the zealots succeeded in fomenting a revolution against Rome.

It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

When he sent out the 72, he gave them similar instructions (Luke 10:1-12). After completing their mission, they returned with great rejoicing (Luke 10:17-21).

People were always flocking to Jesus. Some of them wanted to become his disciples. He explained what that would entail (Luke 9:23-26). Later on, he again explained his requirements if someone would be his disciple (Luke 14:25-35). Several times he encountered people who wanted to follow him, but were not ready to drop everything and come after him (Luke 9:57-62; Matthew 8:18-23). He did not change his requirements to accommodate their busy schedules.

For Jesus, he insisted that loyalty to him trump traditional family connections (Mark 3:31-35; Luke 11:27-28). Actually, he knew that following him would cause family divisions (Luke 12:51-53), a fact he knew well; "For not even his brothers believed in him" (John 7:5).

After Jesus' sermon about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, many of his disciples grumbled and even quit following him:

John 6:60-69

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" 61 But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63 It is the spirit which gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) 65 And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." 66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. 67 So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

The Rewards of Discipleship

Jesus' whole life focused on bringing God glory. He recognized that God would receive glory as his disciples bore much fruit (John 15:8). Beyond this, he offered to lighten their loads:

Matthew 11:28-30

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Still, that was not all. Once Peter asked Jesus what he and the other eleven would get as a reward for leaving everything and following him. Jesus did not rebuke Peter, but answered him honestly:

Matthew 19:27-29

27 Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" 28 Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

He promised eternal life for those who heard his voice and followed him.

John 10:27-28

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Historical Jesus 8: Paradoxical Submission

Jesus enjoyed an intimate relationship with his father. He often spent time with God in prayer. For example, when he first began his ministry, he went to Peter's house and healed a ton of people. Then, he got up early and disappeared:

Mark 1:35-37

35 And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, 37 and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you."

Right before he chose the twelve to be his closest disciples, he spent all night in prayer on a mountain (Luke 6:12). As his popularity increased "he would withdraw to desolate places and pray" (Luke 5:16). It was when he finished praying in a certain place that his disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). After feeding the five thousand, he sent his disciples away on a boat and went up on the mountain by himself to pray, late into evening (Matthew 14:22-23).²⁶ He was one with God.²⁷

He Depended on the God for Everything

Jesus shows us the paradox of greatness through utter submission. Forty times in the Gospel of John, Jesus says his father sent him. He was utterly transparent to someone else. He said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me" (John 12:44-45). Another time he said, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" (John 14:9-10).

How was Jesus able to stay in tune with his father? God had anointed him with his spirit.

Isaiah 11:2-3

2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. 3 And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear,

Isaiah 61:1

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19). Jesus totally depended on God. He had no pride in his own abilities, but deeply trusted in God. This is the greatness of Jesus. For example, one time his critics wrongly thought that in calling God his father, he was somehow claiming equality with him. Jesus replied to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise" (John

²⁶ Jesus' famous miracle of walking on the water resulted from his desire to spend time alone with God. By the time he was ready to go they were already a good distance out on the lake.

²⁷ This does not mean he was one in essence or substance, but one as a husband and wife are one. In fact, he prayed that we be one as he is one with the father (John 17:11).

5:19). Shortly thereafter he said, “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30). Jesus did nothing on his own authority (John 8:28). He recognized his father was greater than he was (John 14:28); for that is precisely why he trusted him and leaned on him so heavily.

Jesus Spoke God’s Words

From the time of Moses, a prophecy declared that God would raise up another like him. God said, “I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him” (Deuteronomy 18:18).²⁸ Jesus fulfilled this prophecy magnificently. Look at how he repeatedly gave God the credit for what he said.

- “For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the spirit without measure.” (John 3.34)
- “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.” (John 7.16)
- “He who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” (John 8.26)
- “For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.” (John 12.49)
- “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority” (John 14.10)
- “The word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.” (John 14.24)
- “For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.” (John 17.8)

Jesus Did God’s Will and Works

Jesus’ prime concern was what his father wanted. He constantly asked himself what would please God. Consider these statements he made about doing God’s will:

- “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.” (John 4.34)
- “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.” (John 6.38)
- “I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8.29)
- “I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.” (John 14.31)

The miracles and deeds of Christ likewise came from his father. Jesus did not even claim the ability to heal. He knew God was the one empowering him to go about “doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38). God enabled and authorized him to perform these signs so that people would believe that he really was in Christ (John 5:36-38; 10:25).

- “If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” (John 10.37-38)

²⁸ Some people believed Jesus was “the prophet” while others thought he was the messiah or an imposter (John 7.40).

- “The Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.” (John 14.10-11)

God Gave Jesus Authority

Throughout the ages God chose unlikely people to work with in order to bring about his plans. Moses, Saul, and David were simple shepherds whom God raised up to accomplish mighty deeds. Because Jesus completely submitted his own will to his father's, God gave him extraordinary authority. It's easy to misunderstand some of Jesus' shocking statements about absolute loyalty that we looked at last time. Jesus expects his followers to put him before their parents, spouses, and children. Was this because Jesus was an out-of-control megalomaniac? No, he knew he represented God to people. He was God's anointed one whom he sent to save us. As a result, how they respond to the son would determine their relationship with the father. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me” (John 14.6). He reveals God to the world. He said, “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known” (John 1.18).²⁹

As a result of Christ's utter submission to God's will, He gave him astounding authority. Jesus said, “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.” (John 3:35) Consider this text about God conferring on Jesus the task of raising the dead:

John 5:26-30

26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. 28 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. 30 "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

The relationship was two way. Jesus humbled himself completely before God now, so God promised to exalt him above everyone else later.³⁰ Often the skeptics of Jesus' time misunderstood and twisted what he said regarding his relationship to the Father. It's important, especially when reading John's Gospel, to recognize who is saying what. We want to be careful not to side with Jesus' critics. For example, in one incident they thought Jesus was claiming to be God. Here is how Jesus handled that situation:

John 10:24-39

24 So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one." 31 The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. 32 Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" 33

²⁹ See also Luke 10.22: “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

³⁰ Christ's exaltation begins with his resurrection and ascension but doesn't culminate until he returns in power to establish God's righteous reign on the earth.

The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God." 34 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? 35 If he called them gods to whom the word of God came-- and Scripture cannot be broken-- 36 do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? 37 If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; 38 but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." 39 Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.

Jesus is not claiming to be God but God's representative or agent to carry out His will. The psalm Jesus quoted talks about God judging unjust rulers. He called them gods because they were His agents who were supposed to do His will. However, these wicked ones did not submit to God's will, so He tells them: "I said, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince'" (Psalm 82:6-7). Jesus uses this secondary usage of the word "God" as one who represents God and does His will to explain his relationship with the Father.³¹

As we will see, God's exaltation of Jesus did not end there. After his resurrection Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28:18). Later on, after he ascends we read that God "seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:20-23). Today, Jesus is the highest exalted being in the universe, next to God. How did he get there? It wasn't by clawing his way to the top, stepping on those beneath him. No, he emptied himself of himself so that God could fully indwell him. If the greatest man who ever lived depended on God this much, how much more should we trust in God and seek His guidance on how to live, what to say, and what to do?

³¹ Examples of others called "god" because they represented him include Moses (Exodus 7.1), local judges (Exodus 21.7; 22.8-9), the king of Israel (Psalm 45.6), the Messiah (Isaiah 9.6), and the angels (Psalm 8.5; cf. Hebrews 2.7).

Historical Jesus 9: Jewish Groups

Four Main Jewish Groups

“The Jews had for a great while had three sects of philosophy peculiar to themselves; the sect of the Essenes, and the sect of the Sadducees, and the third sort of opinions was that of those called Pharisees;...But of the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy, Judas the Galilean was the author.” (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.11, 23)

Two centuries before Jesus’ began his ministry, a Greek empire ruled over the land of Israel. The empire outlawed the Law of Moses (Torah) and defiled the Temple by sacrificing a pig to an idol there. This caused a revolution led by the Hasmonean family who presided over Israel from 167-63 bc.³² They won their religious freedom and eventually political freedom. During this period, several groups emerged including the Pharisees, Essenes, and Sadducees.³³

Pharisees and Sadducees in the Hasmonean Period³⁴

167-166 ³⁵	Mattathias	initiated revolution	---	military leader	---
167-160	Judah the Maccabee	captured and cleansed Temple	son of Mattathias	military leader	---
160-143	Jonathan Apphus	achieved religious freedom	son of Mattathias	high priest	possibly instigated Essenes to withdraw
142-135	Simon Thassi	achieved political freedom	son of Mattathias	high priest	---
134-104	John Hyrcanus	minted coins, conquered Samaria, Idumea	son of Simon	high priest	supported Pharisees then Sadducees
104-103	Judah Aristobulus	conquered Galilee	son of Hyrcanus	king & high priest	infuriated Pharisees by claiming kingship

³² Our best source for information about the Greek persecution, the revolutionary war, the capture and cleansing of the Temple, and the eventual achievement of political independence comes from the books of first and second Maccabees.

³³ It is possible that these three groups once comprised the Hasideans who worked hard to resist Greek influence, especially among the youth. The Hasideans dedicated themselves to obeying God’s laws and teaching them to others. They participated in the revolution as well (1 Maccabees 2:42).

³⁴ For much of this lecture, I’m indebted to Shaye J.D. Cohen for his book *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*: Second Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2006), pp. 138-166.

³⁵ All dates are BC.

103-76	Alexander Jannaeus	conquered Iturea, Gaza	brother of Aristobulus	king & high priest	backed Sadducees, killed 800 Pharisees
76-67	Salome Alexandra	focused on internal prosperity	wife of Hyrcanus then Aristobulus	queen	supported Pharisees, her brother was leader
67	Hyrcanus II	lasted only 3 months; later became Antipater's puppet	son of Jannaeus & Alexandra	king & high priest	supported Pharisees then Sadducees
67-63	Aristobulus II	civil war with his brother; lost kingdom to Rome	brother of Hyrcanus II	king & high priest	supported Sadducees
63	Roman Empire	Pompey defeats Jerusalem	---	---	---

Pharisees

Shaye Cohen:

"Practically all scholars now agree that the name "Pharisee" derives from the Hebrew and Aramaic *parush or perushi* (in the plural, *perushim*), which means "one who is separated"³⁶

Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.1.3-4

"They are extremely influential among the masses; and all prayers and sacred rites of divine worship are performed according to their exposition...Whenever the Sadducees assume some office, though they submit unwillingly and perforce, yet submit they do to the dictates of the Pharisees, since otherwise the masses would not tolerate them."

Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 13.10.6

"The Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers; and concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side."

The kind of Judaism that survived the Jewish War (a.d. 66-73), rabbinic Judaism, descended from the Pharisees. We know that the house of Gamaliel (known to be Pharisaic) led the rabbis around a.d. 100.

Saducees

Shaye Cohen:

³⁶ Shaye J.D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*: Second Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2006), p. 152.

“Most scholars now agree that the name ‘Saducee’ derives from the Hebrew *Zeduqi* and means ‘a descendant (or: adherent) of Zadok the priest.’ ...Presumably this is a self-designation. Sadducees see themselves as the descendants of Zadok the priest, that is, as the true priests who are to officiate in the temple.”³⁷

Mishnah Yadayim 4.7

“The Sadducees say: We denounce you, Pharisees, for you say, if my ox or my donkey cause any damage, I am liable [to compensate], but if my manservant or maidservant cause any damage, I am exempt [from compensating]! Just as with regard to my ox and my donkey, with which I am not obligated to perform any mitzvot, and I am thereby [still] liable [to compensate] for damages, does it not follow with regard to my manservant or maidservant, with whom I am obligated to perform mitzvot, that I should be liable [to compensate] for damages [which they cause]?! They [the Pharisees] said to them, “No. If [i.e. just because] you stated this [law] with regard to my ox or my donkey, which do not have cognitive capabilities, would you say this with regard to my manservant or maidservant who do have cognitive capabilities?!” For [if that logical leap is made], if I offend [one of] them, he may go and set fire to another's [grain] pile, and I will be liable to pay for damages!”

Acts 23:8 (See also Mark 12:18.)

“For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.”

The Sadducees worked with the priests and captain of the Temple and were able to send out the police to arrest people (Acts 4:1-3). Furthermore, the high priest and those with him are of the party of the Sadducees (Acts 5:17).

Essenes³⁸

Philo of Alexandria (25 bc – ad 50) estimated that there were 4,000 Essenes in the first century.³⁹ They believed the Temple was corrupt so they sent no animal sacrifices, but they did send other offerings. They denied themselves bodily pleasures, often living in communes out in the desert. In these all-male, celibate groups, the men could join only after taking an oath of loyalty and enduring a three-year trial period. Essenes emphasized purity and washings and even wore white garments. Some Essenes did live in villages and married. They believed in the coming end of days when God would purge the world of evil, establish a new Temple, and put them in authority. They believed the priesthood in Jerusalem was corrupted and that they were led by true priests, the proper sons of Zadok. The Essenes perished in ad 68 during the Jewish War when they failed to defeat the Romans. The Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran provide us with much information about the Essenes.⁴⁰

Zealots (The Fourth Philosophy)⁴¹

³⁷ Cohen, pp. 152-3.

³⁸ Sources for the Essenes include Philo, *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 12-13, Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 13.171-172; 18.18-22; *Wars of the Jews* 2.119-161

³⁹ Philo, *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 12

⁴⁰ Generally, scholars associate the Dead Sea Scrolls with Qumran settlement nearby and identify them as Essene writings. Some scholars have challenged these conclusions.

⁴¹ Some scholars dispute that Zealots are identical to the fourth philosophy described by Josephus, preferring to see them as a subset that only flourished in the generation after Christ.

The Zealots began with Judah the Galilean in ad 6 who incited a rebellion against the Romans when they called for a census. The revolution failed; the Romans killed Judah, and his followers scattered (Acts 5:37).

Jospehus *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.1.6

“They have an inviolable attachment to liberty; and say that God is to be their only ruler and Lord. They also do not value dying any kind of death, nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man Lord”

It is possible that Jesus’ disciple, Simon the Zealot, was from this movement. It is hard to say if the Zealots were a continuous group or movement from their beginning in ad 6 to when they succeeded in instigating a full revolution in ad 66. What we can say is that in the ad 50s, a group called the Sicarii (dagger men) snuck around the streets of Jerusalem, associating Jewish supporters of Roman rule with concealed curved daggers. The Zealots met their end in a mass suicide atop Masada at the end of the failed Jewish war of independence in ad 73.

Comparison of the Four Main Groups

Sect	Influence	Emphasis	Distinctive beliefs
Pharisees	held in high esteem by most people	interpreting Torah and living Torah today	oral Torah, obedience is paramount
Sadducees	aristocracy, Roman governors	the Temple is how we worship God	no resurrection; written Torah only
Essenes	generally admired by all as holy men (much like monks living in desert monasteries)	Temple is corrupt; people are too lax; train in holiness	communal living, purity, ascetic, prepare for final battle
Zealots	oppressed, offended, discontents, revolutionaries	need to take the land back; nothing worse than a Roman sympathizer	ends justify means; violence is the answer
Jesus	people of the land, outcasts, especially sick and possessed	repentance in light of the coming Kingdom, healing, exorcism	Messianic movement; love enemies; cross as ransom

Four More Groups: Chief Priests, Sanhedrin, Scribes, and Samaritans⁴²

Beyond Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots, several other Jewish groups of varying types are important for understanding Jesus in his own historical context. These groups often overlap with the ones we have just considered.

Chief Priests

⁴² The Herodians would be a fifth group, likely just a designation for participants and supporters of the Herods (cf. Mark 3:6; 12:13).

Many priests served during the time of Christ. Some were Pharisees, some were Sadducees, and some were neither. “The plural ‘chief priests’ describes members of the high-priestly families who serve in the Sanhedrin; ruling and former high priests together with members of the prominent priestly families (Acts 4:6).”⁴³ Since we know the high priests during Christ’s time were Sadducees, probably most of the chief priests were also Sadducees. These were the power brokers in Jerusalem during Jesus’ ministry.

Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin, often translated “council,” was the main leadership body who handled legal issues and ruled on criminal cases. Since there was no separation of religion from the government, they enforced Jewish law as well as managed civil affairs on behalf of the Roman government. They included Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes, and elders. The Romans empowered them to handle most issues but would not allow them to exercise the death penalty with one exception: if a Gentile (non-Jew) went past the court of the Gentiles into the Jewish areas of the Temple complex.

The Sanhedrin controlled a group of armed men (Temple police) that they could send out to arrest someone. So long as they kept the Jews from rioting or refusing to pay taxes, the Roman governors and soldiers were content. As such, the Sanhedrin took a particular interest in charismatic leaders, messianic claimants, and revolutionaries. They knew that if they did not stop such people from rallying the people, the Romans would remove them and rule directly (John 11:47-48). The leader of them was the high priest—a man named Joseph Caiaphas.

Scribes

We get the word “scribble” from the word “scribe,” which, in its most basic definition, means someone who can write. Although it’s difficult to get any precision, scholars estimate around 90% of people could not read or write in the time of Jesus. Furthermore, he inhabited an oral culture when memorization and story-telling flourished. However, for the Jews, everything found its basis in the authoritative and inspired written text. Thus, they needed public readers of Scripture in the synagogues as well as copiers to preserve and distribute the sacred scrolls. As a result of spending so much time with the Scriptures, scribes became known as experts in the Law of Moses and as such, were called lawyers. Beyond reading and copying, scribes also served as financial officials and wrote letters for hire. Scribes could be Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, or none of them. However, in the Gospels scribes are usually associated with the Pharisees.

Samaritans

Between the Galilee, where Jesus spent most of time, and Judea, where the Temple was, lay Samaria—a tract of land inhabited by the Samaritans. They believed in the ancient Torah but did not recognize the rest of the Hebrew Bible as inspired or authoritative. They believed Jewish history went wrong during the time of Eli (the priest and judge before Samuel). They thought Solomon should never have built the Temple in Jerusalem. In fact, they had their own Temple of Mount Gerizim until John Hyrcanus destroyed it in 129 bc. The Samaritans denied Jesus hospitality when they found out he was headed to the Temple. Jesus’ disciples’ response gives us an idea of how they felt about Samaritans:

Luke 9:53-56

⁴³ J. J. Douglas, *New Bible Dictionary: Second Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers 1982), pp. 971-2.

53 But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54 And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But he turned and rebuked them. 56 And they went on to another village.

Historical Jesus 10: Conflict

“Conflict plays a large part in the Gospel narratives of the ministry of Jesus...Jesus is shown in conflict with Satan (Mt 12:28)...with natural calamities like storms...with mental illnesses...with religious leaders of his people...with the crowds he draws...with his family...with his disciples...and he is in conflict with his own instinctive clinging to life...when it comes in the way of his Father’s will. Conflict, then, is not a secondary dispensable element in the ministry of Jesus; it is of its essence. Not for Jesus the ecstasy of the frolicking Krishna who is beyond all conflict, nor the serene smile of the Buddha who is wholly untouched by it. His is a short and agitated ministry, ending in a violent and untimely death.”⁴⁴

As we’ll see, Jesus endured conflict throughout his ministry. As such, we should not conclude we are walking with God just because we have peace in our lives, nor should we assume that conflict necessarily means we are doing something wrong. Although Jesus faced difficulties with the Samaritans⁴⁵ and Herodians,⁴⁶ the bulk of his conflict—at least until the last week of his life—resulted from interactions with the Pharisees.⁴⁷ I have organized the Pharisees’ disagreements with Jesus into three groups: legal issues, challenges to his legitimacy, and problems with Jesus’ style of ministry. Once we look at these three, we’ll consider Jesus’ criticisms of the Pharisees.

Legal Disagreements

The most common legal disagreement we find in the Gospels pertains to Sabbath observance. One time, Jesus’ disciples were plucking grain, rubbing it in their hands, and eating on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28). The Pharisees asked, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” Jesus defended them, saying, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?” After pointing out this classic exception to the rule, he said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

In the other incidents related to the Sabbath, Jesus healed people, which raised the ire of the Pharisees. He restored the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1-6), the woman doubled over (Luke 13:12-16), the man with dropsy⁴⁸, and the lame man at the Bethesda pool (John 5). Why did Jesus heal on the Sabbath? He does not give an explicit reason. We know he healed other days as well. Either Jesus did not consider his miracles work, or he felt he had solid precedent to lawfully break the Sabbath. For example, the Law allowed for priests to work on the Sabbath or rescue a person or animal in danger. Here is an example of when the synagogue ruler confronted Jesus for healing on the Sabbath:

Luke 13:11-16

11 And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.” 13 And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was

⁴⁴ George M. Soares-Prabhu, *The Dharma of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2003), p. 164.

⁴⁵ As we saw last time, the Samaritans refused Jesus hospitality in one city (Luke 9:51-56).

⁴⁶ The Pharisees tipped off Jesus that Herod Antipas wanted to kill him to which Jesus replied, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course’” (Luke 13:31-33).

⁴⁷ As we will see later, the Sadducees were instrumental in Jesus’ arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

⁴⁸ Dropsy is edema—a swelling due to abnormal collection of fluid that causes severe pain.

made straight, and she glorified God. 14 But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." 15 Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? 16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

"A number of Jews would have agreed with Jesus that healing takes precedence over the Sabbath; others might have thought that a chronic, nonpainful condition could wait until sundown, lest the healing in this case give the impression that the healer did not honor the day or the commandment....The story highlights Jesus' action as in contradistinction from what the synagogue leader would have preferred. But the crowd – that is the Jewish majority – has no problem with Jesus' healing the woman, and they would have recognized his argument to be a standard form for discussion of legal matters. He argues on the basis of what is called in Hebrew a *gal v'homer*, or "from the lighter to the greater," model.... If you already do X, then you should surely do Y, which is even more important." Jesus' healing itself is a matter of touch, which is not forbidden on the Sabbath: he makes no potions; he unties no cords."⁴⁹

A second issue the Pharisees raised is related to purity (Mark 7:1-15). One time they saw Jesus' disciples were not washing their hands prior to eating. They asked, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" Jesus replied, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" Jesus did not even bother to debate the purity requirement, but instead attacked their underlying practice of adhering to the traditions of the elders.

Jewish rabbis debated what reasons God allowed for divorce. Shammai had taught unseemly conduct qualified whereas Hillel said a man could divorce his wife even if she merely spoiled his food.⁵⁰ The Pharisees brought the subject up to Jesus in an effort to test him (Matthew 19:3-9). They asked, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" Jesus balked at their question, insisting, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." However, they came back at him asking, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus responded, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." It is not clear from this interchange what these Pharisees believed about the subject, but Jesus' position probably struck them as rather strict.⁵¹

Another time a lawyer came to Jesus to test him (Luke 10:25-37). He asked, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" The lawyer answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said, "You have answered

⁴⁹ Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew*, (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), pp. 32-3.

⁵⁰ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Gittin, Folio 90a

⁵¹ Jesus also mentions his position on divorce and remarriage in Matthew 5:31-32. Later on, when dealing with the complications of Christian and non-Christian mixed marriages, Paul gives more instruction on this topic (1 Corinthians 7).

correctly; do this, and you will live.” Obviously the conversation did not go as the lawyer intended. Wanting to justify himself, he asked, “And who is my neighbor?” This is when Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. In it, an ethnic and religious enemy shows compassion on an injured man whereas his own people refuse to help. Jesus asked, “Which of these three, do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” The lawyer answered, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said, “You go, and do likewise.” Although the initial question was about eternal life, it really focused on the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). Thus, this conflict was another legal disagreement. Jesus defines a neighbor as one who acts neighborly rather than a member of one’s own group.

Challenges to His Legitimacy

Although there were some Pharisees who believed that Jesus was a genuine prophet, most of them challenged his authority. One time Jesus claimed, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12-19). The Pharisees said, “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.” Jesus went on to explain that his Father also bore witness about him.

Another time, the Pharisees and Sadducees asked Jesus to show them a sign (Matthew 16:1-5). Ironically, though Jesus’ ministry was chock full of miraculous signs and wonders, he refused to perform one to prove his identity to his critics. He said, “An adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” The sign of Jonah, as it later becomes clear, referred to his time in the grave and subsequent resurrection.

In another similar incident, the Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom would come (Luke 17:20-37). In one sense this was a reasonable question. Jesus went about with his disciples from village to village proclaiming repentance because the Kingdom of God was near. Naturally, one would ask, “Well, when is the kingdom actually going to get here?” Alternatively, they could have been attempting to bait Jesus into setting a date or fixed sign that they could later use to discredit him. Jesus answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:20-21). Here they were asking about the Kingdom while the King is standing right in front of them. Jesus was preaching the Kingdom gospel, teaching to live in light of the Kingdom, enacting the Kingdom through his healing, exorcisms, and other acts of restoration. He was bringing the Kingdom to bear right in their midst, and they couldn’t see it. Then he turned to his disciples and explained that when the Kingdom would come, it would happen suddenly when people least expect it and used two examples: the flood in the days of Noah and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. When it arrives, they’ll know it just like how lightening is visible when it flashes across the night sky.

Jesus’ Style of Ministry

In addition to the conflict we’ve already seen, the Pharisees also took issue with Jesus’ particular style of doing ministry. Early on, some people brought a paralyzed man to Jesus for healing (Matthew 9:1-8). Jesus saw the man’s faith and said, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” Some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” Jesus replied, “Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, and walk?’ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” he said to the paralytic, “Get up, pick up your bed and go home.” Remember, we need to be careful not to side with Jesus’ critics. They thought he was taking God’s authority onto himself by forgiving sins. That is not what the text says. Jesus does not say, “I forgive you,” but “Your sins are forgiven.” Jesus is pronouncing forgiveness. This is why when the

crowds saw it, “they glorified God who had given such authority to men.” After his resurrection, Jesus told his disciples, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld” (John 20:23). (See also Matthew 18:18 on binding and loosing). Jesus was operating in a way that they misunderstood, so they jumped to the conclusion that he was blaspheming when he was really doing God’s will.

Although the scribes and Pharisees quibbled with Jesus about minor issues like fasting,⁵² they crossed the line when they accused him of casting out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons (Luke 11:14-32). Jesus had been casting out a mute demon to the amazement of the crowds when they leveled this slanderous accusation against him. Jesus replied, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste...and if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?” Then he went on to say, “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28). I know this insult against Jesus was particularly egregious because he said, “Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:31-32). Apparently, the skeptics and naysayers could not refute Jesus’ miraculous powers so that alleged they were from Satan. Rather than recognizing the signs as testifying to Jesus’ credibility, they found a way to slander him. However, since Jesus’ miracles really were from the God’s Spirit, they were blaspheming God Himself!

The third and most prominent issue the Pharisees brought against Jesus regarding his way of doing ministry was associating with sinners. So frequently did Jesus attend dinner parties that his enemies spread rumors about him saying, “Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” (Luke 7:34). Pharisees tended to separate themselves from sinners, whereas Jesus spent a great deal of time with them. Jesus even called the tax collector Levi (also called Matthew) to follow him as a disciple (Luke 5:29-32). That night, Levi made a great feast in his house and entertained a large company of tax collectors and others. The Pharisees grumbled, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus answered, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

Another time a Pharisee, named Simon, invited Jesus over for dinner (Luke 7:36-50). While he reclined at the table on a cushion with his feet behind him, a woman came weeping. She was a known sinner in the town. She stood behind Jesus and washed his feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with expensive ointment from an alabaster flask. Simon thought to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” Just then Jesus told a story about two debtors who were forgiven. One of them owed much more than the other, then he asked, “Now which of them will love him more?” Simon said, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” Jesus explained, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” Then, turning to the woman, he said, “Your sins are forgiven.” This caused those at the table to ask, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” Jesus said to her, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” They were probably right. She was a sinner. However, they missed that she was convicted and sorrowful. They couldn’t see that she wanted to repent, that she could change and have a fresh start. Jesus gave her that second chance. He saw her obvious repentance and told her that she was forgiven. All of this rubbed the Pharisees the wrong way.

⁵² The Pharisees asked Jesus’ disciples why they didn’t fast. Jesus told them they would not fast so long as he was with them, but after he was gone, they would fast (Luke 5:33-35). Jesus recognized the newness of his ministry style when he talked about putting new wine in new wineskins and new patches on new garments (Luke 5:36-38).

Later in his ministry, some Pharisees and scribes said, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” This time, Jesus narrated a triple set of parables (Luke 15). He told them about a shepherd whose sheep had gotten lost. He left the ninety-nine to go find the one. When he found it, he rejoiced. Jesus explains, “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” In the second iteration, he told about a woman who lost a valuable coin. After she found it, she called together her friends and neighbors and rejoiced with them. “Just so,” says Jesus, “I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Lastly, he related the tale of a son who asked for his inheritance from his father and promptly went off and squandered everything. After ending up destitute as a pig feeder, he came to himself and journeyed home, asking to work as a hired servant. His father wouldn’t hear any of it and embraced his son, saying, “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” His other son, the “righteous one,” however, was sulking out in the field and would not come into the party. He was too self-centered to rejoice. He was angry that his father never gave him a young goat to celebrate with his friends. I’m sure the Pharisees must have felt the heat when Jesus got to the end of that parable. They are all about doing what is right, which is commendable, but they also need to compassionately help those who have strayed to find their path.

Jesus’ Criticisms

Now that we’ve considered the major areas of conflict the scribes and Pharisees had with Jesus, we will look at what issues Jesus brought against them in return. I want to mention just two before moving on to Jesus’ most sustained critique in Matthew 23.

Once, Jesus told a parable, a zinger, to convict some people “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.” Here is what he said:

Luke 18:10-14

10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus valued humility highly. He taught the last would be first and the first, last. He saw the showoffs on the street corners with their broadened phylacteries and long fancy prayers. When they fasted they made sure everyone knew it by leaving their faces unwashed, neglecting to anoint their heads, and disfiguring their faces. Jesus saw this as a major problem for the religious leaders of his time.

Another issue Jesus criticized the Pharisees about was greed. Jesus had told his disciples a parable about an unjust manager who used his money wisely to make friends (Luke 16). He said, “You cannot serve God and money.” However, the Pharisees ridiculed Jesus since they were lovers of money. To confront their lack of generosity he told them the parable about Lazarus and the rich man. The moral of this story was that they should use their money to help the needy rather than hoard it and face God’s judgment.

In addition to pride and greed, Jesus also confronted the Pharisees on several more issues. Here is his critique:

Matthew 23:1-33

1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, 3 so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. 4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

5 They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, 6 and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues 7 and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. 8 But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. 10 Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. 15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' 17 You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? 18 And you say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.' 19 You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? 20 So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. 21 And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. 22 And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.

23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. 27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. 28 So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, 30 saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' 31 Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. 33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

34 Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, 35 so that on you may come

all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

As those who are trying to follow Jesus, we need to be careful not to find ourselves in conflict with him. We can't allow our hearts to harden or to focus on holiness so much that we forget compassion. We have to ward off the sickness of greediness with the cure of generosity. We must be genuine, for there is nothing Jesus rails against more than hypocrisy. We need to do the right thing, but for God to see it not other people. We humble ourselves and seek God's glory and he will exalt us in due time. Let us be the kind of believers who recognize our limitations and depend on God's empowering grace to help us do his will in our own time.

Historical Jesus 11: Entering Jerusalem

Passover Background

The festival of Passover was an intense time of year when riots were likely to occur. The city's population swelled with pilgrims from near and far. Josephus estimates a total of 2.7 million celebrants in his own time (Josephus, War 6.423-426). To give some perspective, the population of Rome—probably the world's most populated city—was only 1.5 million. Passover began by offering more sacrifices than any other festival.⁵³ Furthermore, the day memorialized God's judgment upon Egypt for enslaving His people. People couldn't help but see the irony of remembering this liberation while the Roman soldiers looked down from above, eager to quash any who dared to defy Caesar and his representatives. Everyone knew if there was going to be trouble, it would happen during Passover. As a result, the Romans were on high alert, and the Jewish Sanhedrin had their eyes out for any potential troublemakers.

Messianic Secret

Up until when he entered Jerusalem, Jesus had carefully guarded his messianic identity. Here are two examples:

Luke 4:40-41

40 Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. 41 And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.

Matthew 16:15-20

15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven...20 Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

However, when he was nearing Jerusalem, he stopped in Jericho and was hailed "Son of David" by a blind man, named Bartimaeus. Jesus does not correct him; instead, he heals him, and the man joins Jesus' entourage as they climb the hill to the fateful city of Jerusalem.

⁵³ Josephus, Antiquities 17.213

Triumphal Entry

Jesus begins walking up from Jericho to the Mt. of Olives and then to Jerusalem. N. T. Wright helpfully describes the journey:

“If you’ve ever been to the Holy Land, you will know that to go from Jericho to Jerusalem involves a long, hard climb. Jericho is the lowest city on earth, over 800 feet below sea level. Jerusalem, which is only a dozen or so miles away, is nearly 3,000 feet *above* sea level. The road goes through hot, dry deserts all the way to the top of the Mount of Olives, at which point, quite suddenly, you have at the same time the first real vegetation and the first, glorious sight of Jerusalem itself. Even if you were climbing that road every week on business, there would still be a sense of exhilaration, of delight and relief, when you got to the top.”⁵⁴

Before Jesus got to the top, he sent two disciples to fetch a young donkey.

Mark 11:7-11

7 And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. 8 And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. 9 And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" 11 And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

In this incident, we encounter three coded actions: (1) riding the donkey, (2) waving palm branches, and the cry, “Son of David.”

Riding the Donkey

By riding the donkey, Jesus provocatively fulfilled Zechariah’s prophecy.⁵⁵

Zechariah 9:9-10

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. 10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall

⁵⁴ N. T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (), p. 146.

⁵⁵ This may also point to David putting Solomon on a mule to announce his enthronement (1 Kings 1:38-40).

be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Palm Branches and Coats in the Road

They spread their coats in the road. A long time before, people had acted in a similar way when they declared Jehu king (2 Kings 9:13). They also waved palm branches, which had happened when Judah the Maccabee captured the Temple and cleansed it and again when his brother Simon achieved independence for Israel and eliminated the last soldiers holed up in the fortress next to the Temple. Furthermore, leaders featured palm branches on their coins, including John Hyrcanus (134-104 bc), Alexander Jannaeus (104-76 bc), and Simon ben Kosiba (ad 132/3).⁵⁶ Wright explains:

“You don’t spread cloaks on the road—especially in the dusty, stony Middle East! – for a friend or even a respected senior member of your family. You do it for royalty. And you don’t cut branches off trees, or foliage from the fields, to wave in the streets just because you feel somewhat elated; you do it because you are welcoming a king.”⁵⁷

Son of David

The people declaring Jesus’ “son of David” are likely from his entourage who had accompanied him for the journey. Bartimaeus had cried out “son of David,” and Jesus may have picked up more followers from this incident. (This crowd, probably mostly Galileans, is likely not the same as the Jerusalem mob who later cries out, “Crucify him!”) They shouted, “The Son of David,” “Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!” and “The King of Israel.”

The triumphal entry is Jesus’ “blatant messianic self-advertisement.”⁵⁸ He is publicly announcing his claim to be God’s Messiah. Still, he could turn back. He doesn’t have to enter Jerusalem. This becomes his moment of truth. Other leaders of messianic and quasi-messianic movements both before Jesus and after him inevitably found themselves quickly crushed under the intolerant and paranoid boot of Roman might.⁵⁹ Jesus knows what he is doing; he knows the cost; and does it anyhow.

⁵⁶ In Revelation we encounter a scene of people “wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands,” proclaiming salvation (Revelation 7:9-10), which may be another example of celebrating victory of God’s king.

⁵⁷ Wright, p. 147.

⁵⁸ R. T. France, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), p. 429.

⁵⁹ Examples include Athronges (4 bc), Judah the Galilean (ad 6), the Samaritan prophet (ad 36), Theudas (ad 45), the Egyptian Prophet (ad 58), Simon bar Giora (ad 69), and Simon ben Kosiba (ad 132).

Rejection

As he nears the gates of Jerusalem, he encounters resistance and criticism from the Pharisees. He finds himself overcome with emotion and weeps over the city's coming judgment.

Luke 19:37-40

37 As he was drawing near-- already on the way down the Mount of Olives-- the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, 38 saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." 40 He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

Darrell Bock writes:

"The Pharisees' rejection near the end of the entry shows that nothing has changed. The leadership still refuses to accept that Jesus is God's messenger—much less Messiah. Their protest at the disciples' actions is but the first of many acts of resistance at the end of Luke's Gospel. The irony is that Jesus declares that if the disciples did not speak out, creation would. Inanimate objections have better perception of what God is doing than do the people that Jesus came to save."⁶⁰

Jesus' ministry is God's effort to bring His people back to Himself, but they rejected Jesus and thus God Himself whose deeds Jesus always did and words he always spoke.

John 12:44-50

44 And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. 45 And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. 46 I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. 47 If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. 48 The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. 49 For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment-- what to say and what to speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."

⁶⁰ Darrell Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament: Luke 9:51-24:53* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 1547.

Overwhelmed with sadness, Jesus prophesies of the city's coming judgment.

Luke 19:41-44

41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Bock:

"The lament over Jerusalem shows Jesus' pain at Israel's failure to respond with faith. In 19:41-44, Jesus sounds like Jeremiah lamenting the coming exile (Jeremiah 6:6-21) or Isaiah declaring the impending fall of Jerusalem (Isaiah 29:1-4). Jesus' lament over Jerusalem shows that the consequence of rejecting God's messenger is national judgment. When God sues for peace and his terms are rejected, only judgment remains. Jesus predicts the nation's collapse as tragic fact."⁶¹

Temple Cleansing

The triumphal entry got many of inhabitants' attention, but what he did next turned him from a curious charismatic leader to a serious threat whom the city's power brokers had to eliminate, one way or another.

Mark 11:15-18

15 And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 16 And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

The most popular understanding of what happened here is that Jesus rebuked and intervened to prevent inappropriate merchandising in the Temple area. He calls them robbers because they were jacking up the prices to take advantage of the throngs of sacrificers coming from long distances. This may have been the case, but the Scripture does not explicitly say so. Jesus here quotes Jeremiah who had pronounced God's

⁶¹ Bock, p. 1547.

judgment on the Temple to superstitious Jews who thought they could get away with anything and find safety in the Temple (Jeremiah 7:11). Thus, the Temple was not a hideaway for criminals, but God's house where they should worship Him. Charles Feinberg explains:

"Ultimately the people were treating the temple, the house of God, as robbers do their dens. It was a temporary refuge till they sallied forth on another foray. Limestone caves in Palestine were used as robbers' dens; so Jeremiah's metaphor was clear to his hearers."⁶²

Another commentator, R. T. France writes:

"His attack on the traders and money changers, who were there in the Court of the Gentiles with the permission of the temple authorities and who provided a convenient and probably essential service to worshippers visiting the temple from outside Jerusalem, was not simply (if it was at all) a protest against exploitation by unscrupulous traders...It was a repudiation of the way the temple's affairs were being conducted (and therefore of those under whose authority this took place), not simply an attempt to correct abuse of the system...As apparently a one-man demonstration it is unlikely to have had any long-term practical effect, and we may well assume that the tables were back in place the next day. But it marked Jesus out as more than an idealistic teacher. He is a radical reformer, and he has thrown down the gauntlet to the temple authorities in a way they cannot ignore, and to which they will respond...Following on the royal procession to the city, this action looks like a further deliberate claim to messianic authority. Seen in that light, this was not an attempt at short-term reform of the system but a symbolic declaration of eschatological judgment."⁶³

Regardless, if the Temple demonstration was targeting the greed of merchants or more in the vein of a prophetic demonstration of coming judgment, it certainly got the attention of the leaders. Here is how they responded:

Luke 19:47-48

47 And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and

⁶² Charles Lee Feinberg, ed. Frank Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel* vol. 6, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 428.

⁶³ R. T. France, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 437-9.

the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, 48 but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.

Next, we'll look at how the situation heated up for Jesus throughout the last week leading to his arrest.

Historical Jesus 12: Intensified Conflict

After he enters Jerusalem, Jesus spent his days in the Temple courts teaching the people and his nights on Mount Olivet staying with friends at Bethany (Lk 21:37-38).

Stumper Questions

During Jesus' last week of ministry, three times religious leaders pose him questions designed to entrap him. Right from the start, the chief priests and elders asked him, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" (Matthew 21:23). This question seeks to undermine Jesus' credibility. He doesn't have authority from any of the official leaders to interrupt the goings on in the Temple. His authority comes from God, but they could easily call that into question.

Matthew 21:24-27

24 Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." 27 So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Next, the Pharisees and Herodians partnered up to entangle him in his words (Mark 12:13-17). They asked, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" Jesus perceived their hypocrisy and replied, "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." After they brought one to him Jesus asked, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" "Caesar's," they replied. Jesus said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." This answer perfectly avoids both pitfalls this question forces the answerer to fall into. On the one hand, if Jesus said to pay taxes, he would lose credibility with the people. On the other, if he said not to, they would immediately report him to the authorities. Jesus gives the kind of answer that they could understand in different ways, and all they could do was marvel.

The third stumper question came from the Sadducees about resurrection (Luke 20:27-40). They reminded Jesus that Moses had taught them to marry a brother's widow if she didn't have any children. Then they told a preposterous story about seven brothers who all lawfully married the same woman, one after the other. Then they asked, "In the

resurrection, whose wife will the woman be?" Once again, his interlocutors think they have Jesus boxed in. No matter which way he answers, they have come-back ready to throw at him.

Luke 20:34-40

34 And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, 36 for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. 38 Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him." 39 Then some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well." 40 For they no longer dared to ask him any question.

Since death ends a marriage, people would have to get remarried in the resurrection. Jesus rejects this notion, averring that God's people will be like the angels who do not marry. Next, Jesus uses an interesting though obscure argument to support his belief in resurrection. Here is how Anthony Buzzard explains Jesus' response:

"The logic of Jesus' argument was simply that since Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had long been dead, there must be a future resurrection to restore them to life, so that their relationship with the living God could be resumed and they could receive what the covenant had guaranteed them. On no account is Jesus' answer to be used as a justification for believing that the patriarchs were *already* alive. The issue between Jesus and his opponents was whether there would be a future resurrection. Jesus argued that the covenant would fail if the patriarchs were left in their graves. For God to be God of the living, the patriarchs must rise to life again in the future resurrection (Dan 12:2)."⁶⁴

An Honest Question

Of course, while Jesus was dueling with the Sadducees, others were listening in. One such man, a scribe, quite enjoyed Jesus' defense of the resurrection (Mark 12:28-34). So, he asked Jesus, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" This was not a stumper question. The scribe is checking Jesus out, but not in an attempt to embarrass or accuse him. He really wants to see where Jesus is coming from. Jesus replies by quoting the Shema—the classic statement of Judaism from Deuteronomy. "Hear, O

⁶⁴ Anthony Buzzard, (Fayetteville, GA: Restoration Fellowship, 1999), p. 65. See also Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse), p 60 and Warren Prestidge, *Life, Death and Destiny* (Auckland, New Zealand: Resurrection Publishing, 1998), pp. 41-2.

Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.” The scribe agreed with Jesus and said, “You have truly said that he is one and there is no other besides him.” To this Jesus replied, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” They agree on the definition of God as a singular individual.⁶⁵ They agree that humanity’s duty is to love the one God with everything and our neighbors as ourselves. This is the one positive interaction Jesus has in this public scene.

Jesus’ Stumper Question

Now that they’ve gone a few rounds on the offensive, Jesus puts them on the defensive by asking his own stumper question (Matthew 22:41-45). To the Pharisees he asked, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They replied, “The son of David.” Jesus continues:

Matthew 22:43-46

43 He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, 44 "'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? 45 If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" 46 And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

This is a really tough saying to understand because Jesus doesn’t explain what he means. He poses the question and just lets it hang there in the air. My thought is that Jesus was trying to show them that descending from David is not enough. It is necessary for the Messiah to be a “son of David” but that is not sufficient. Mary was of David’s descendants, but Jesus’ father—well, that’s another story. He is, in fact, the son of God. His mother knew it, the demons knew it, but these critics were clueless. Jesus is both son of David and Son of God.

Parables against His Enemies

Interspersed with them asking Jesus questions, he told several parables. That Jesus could exhibit such creative genius under such hostile conditions boggles my mind. Typically our wit diminishes the more stress we experience.

⁶⁵ That God is one person is clear from the scribe’s usage of the *singular* personal pronoun “he” when he said, “He is one and there is no other besides him.” Thus, Jesus and the Jewish scribe both agree on God’s oneness leaving no room for later Trinitarian conceptions (*pace* Athanasius).

Jesus told them a story about two sons whom their father told to work in the vineyard (Matthew 21:28-32). The first said he wouldn't go but then changed his mind and went, but the second said he would go but then didn't. Jesus asked them which had done his father's will. They replied, "The first." Jesus continued, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him." This kind of direct confrontation was Jesus' style.

Next, he told another parable about wicked tenants who abused and even murdered the representatives the owner sent to collect the fruit (Matthew 21:33-44). Then the master sent his own son, thinking they would have to respect him, but instead they seized him and killed him. Jesus asked, "When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They answered, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." Unwittingly, they have condemned themselves. They are the tenants, and Jesus is the son. In just a few days, they will kill him, bringing God's judgment down on themselves.

Lastly, Jesus narrated the story of a wedding banquet (Matthew 22:1-14). A king gave a wedding feast for his son, but those whom he invited would not come, so he punished them and opened up the invitation to anyone who was willing to attend. The Pharisees were invited to believe in God's Messiah but did not, though the tax-collectors, prostitutes, and sinners received him warmly. Sadly, even such razor sharp and convicting parables could not penetrate the hard hearts of these people. In the end, they would do just as the parable said.

Jesus did not only use parables, he also pronounced judgment on the Pharisees and scribes directly (Matthew 23). We have already looked at how he accused them of hypocrisy and called them to repentance, so we will not look at that now, though it is good to keep in mind that the eight thunderous woes of Matthew 23 occurred in the context of his last week.

From his triumphal entry to his Temple disturbance to his public confrontations, Jesus' enemies prepared to act. They weren't sure how they could capture him, but they knew they wanted to kill him (as well as Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead, cf. John 12:9-11).

Matthew 26:3-5

3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the

high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, 4 and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. 5 But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people."

For his part, Jesus continued preaching openly in the Temple courts to all who would listen.

John 12:42-50

42 Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

In the end, they would have to wait for someone to hatch a plan to whisk Jesus away secretly. But, where did Jesus stay? When could they get to him when he wasn't surrounded by the multitude? If only they had an insider—one of Jesus' inner circle—to tell them where and when they could arrest him....

Historical Jesus 13: Olivet Discourse

Matthew 24:1-3

1 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. 2 But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." 3 As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

Jesus' prophecy of the Temple's destruction caused the disciples to ask for more information. For them the destruction of the Temple would be even worse than someone demolishing the White House in America today. The Temple was the symbol of God's presence among His people. It was the center of national and religious pride. It was a gorgeous structure overlaid with gold so that it gleamed in the sunlight. The courtyards surrounding this decadent marble Temple were the size of six football fields. Jesus' prophecy was extreme, and the disciples wanted to know more about it.

The disciples' questions kicked off one of Jesus' longest discourses. Since it occurs on the Mount of Olives, we call it the Olivet Discourse (found in Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21).⁶⁶ Bible students have quite a few different views on how to interpret Jesus' statements. Some say everything saw its fulfillment in the year a.d. 70 when the Romans besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. Others say Jesus' prophesy pertains to a future Temple and the coming of the Son of Man to establish God's eternal Kingdom on earth. A third option is that Jesus shaped his teaching in such a way that it would encompass both of these events. In what follows I briefly consider some of the benefits and detriments of each.

First off, they asked for a sign when the Temple would fall. Jesus answered this question first negatively and then positively. He explained what events do not qualify as signs: wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, political turbulence, and persecution. These, he said, are merely the beginnings of birth pangs, the contractions before labor intensifies. Then he gave two signs: the abomination of desolation and the Son of Man coming in the clouds.

According to Jesus, the abomination of desolation is a sign that kicks off the great persecution. Jesus, furthermore, linked his understanding to what Daniel had predicted. Some Jews thought Daniel's prophecy about abomination of desolation found fulfillment more than a century before Christ when Antiochus IV, the Seleucid king, erected his own altar in the Temple area and sacrificed a pig to Zeus.

⁶⁶ Since Matthew is the longest and most detailed, I will focus most of my attention on Matthew 24-25.

1 Maccabees 1.44-47, 54-55, 59

44 And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, 45 to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, 46 to defile the sanctuary and the priests, 47 to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals... 54 Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, 55 and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets...59 On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering.

If we look for signs prior to the surrounding of the city of Jerusalem by Roman soldiers, we find an incident when the Zealots overtook the Temple. R. T. France explains:

Josephus (*War* 4.150-57) records tha[t] in the winter of 67/8 the Zealots under John of Gischala took over the temple itself as their headquarters and μεμιασμένοις τοῖς ποσὶ παρήεσαν εἰς τὸ ἅγιον [with the feet being defiled they entered into the sanctuary], appointing their own mock high priest to carry out a travesty of temple ritual; popular outrage led to fighting within the temple itself (4.196-207) with Zealot blood defiling the sanctuary (201)...[I]t took place just before the first major campaign of [the Roman emperor] Vespasian in Judea, when it was still possible to escape into the hills.⁶⁷

Josephus records several other signs that he believed portended the coming destruction.⁶⁸ Some early Christians found the connection between Jesus' prophecy and Josephus' description of Jerusalem's defeat irresistible. Eusebius, the 4th century historian, said, "Anyone comparing our Savior's words with the rest of the historian's record of the war cannot fail to be astonished or to confess the divine character of the Savior's prediction."⁶⁹ He then went on to quote Josephus at length. Of course, the abomination of desolation could also refer to a future event, as seems to be the case in this Scripture:

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, 8

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a

⁶⁷ R. T. France, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), p. 525.

⁶⁸ See Josephus' *The Wars of the Jews* 6.5.3-4 in which he describes a star resembling a sword, a comet, a great light shining on the Temple, a cow that gave birth to a lamb in the temple courtyard, a heavy gate that opened by itself, a vision of chariots and troops in the clouds surrounding the cities, and an earthquake accompanied by a multitude saying, "We are departing from here." Last of all Josephus mentions a certain Jesus of Ananus who unceasingly prophesied "A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against the bridegroom and the bride, and a voice against this whole people!" for four years prior to the war. The Roman proconsul captured and severely beat him but then let him go, concluding the man was deranged.

⁶⁹ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.7

spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God...8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.⁷⁰

Whether past, future, or both, what Jesus said is clear, the abomination of desolation initiates a period of intense persecution followed by the sign of the Son of Man in the clouds. Jesus repeatedly warned his disciples not to fall for false prophets and messiahs, even if they perform mighty miracles. They need not sneak away to an inner room or to an obscure place to find the Christ, rather he will come visibly like lightning flashing across the sky, lighting it up for all to see, or vultures circling above a corpse. When he comes, all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they see the sign of the Son of Man coming on the clouds. Those who think this already occurred explain it thusly:

This language [the darkening of the sun and moon and falling of the stars] was well known, regular code for talking about what we would call huge social and political convulsions. When we say that empires ‘fall,’ or that kingdoms ‘rise,’ we don’t normally envisage any actual downward or upward physical movement. Matthew intends us to understand that the time of the coming of the son of man will be a time when the whole world seems to be in turmoil.

But what will this ‘coming’ itself actually *be*? What will Jesus’ ‘royal appearing’ consist of? Matthew takes us back, in line with so much in Jesus’ teaching, to the prophet Daniel again, and this time to the crucial passage in 7.13. They will see, he says, ‘the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Now in Daniel this certainly refers, not to a *downward* movement of this strange human figure, but to an *upward* movement. The son of man ‘comes’ from the point of view of the heavenly world, that is, he comes *from* earth *to* heaven. His ‘coming’ in this sense, in other words, is not his ‘return’ to earth after a sojourn in heaven. It is his ascension, his vindication, the thing which demonstrates that his suffering has not been in vain.⁷¹

However, with respect to those who hold this view, many other texts that refer to the Son of Man’s coming with angels make it sound much more like an actual coming—what we typically call ‘the second coming.’ Here are the relevant Scriptures:

Mark 8:38

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation,

⁷⁰ See also Revelation 13 about the antichrist figure, there called the beast.

⁷¹ N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone: Part Two* (London: SPCK, 2004), p. 122-3.

of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Matthew 16:27

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.⁷²

Matthew 24:27

For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Matthew 24:30-31

30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Matthew 24:37-44

37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, 39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. 42 Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Matthew 25:31-34

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

⁷² In the next verse (Mt 16:28), Jesus prophesies that some standing there will not die until they "see the Son of Man coming his kingdom." Immediately following this, we find the account of the transfiguration when Peter, James, and John see Jesus glorified with Moses and Elijah. Presumably this is a vision of the age to come when all are resurrected and glorified.

Matthew 26:64

Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."⁷³

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

6 ...God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Jude 1:14-15

14 It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, 15 to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

Revelation 1:7

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

Revelation 22:12

Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.

In the face of so much overwhelming evidence, I find it hard to interpret Jesus' coming as going. Jesus does go, but it is not in a.d. 70, it is forty days after his resurrection when he ascends to heaven to take his seat at the right hand of God. Writing before the Temple fell, Paul spoke of Christ in the past tense as one whom God had already raised and seated at his right hand "far

⁷³ This may be the best evidence for interpreting "coming on the clouds of heaven" as coming to the Ancient of Days rather than coming to the earth. Though, it is hard for me to imagine that Jesus ascended into heaven in the a.d. 30s and did not actually experience exaltation until a.d. 70 when the Temple fell. Presumably, Jesus comes to God who gives him the authority to rule earth and THEN returns to earth to establish his dominion.

above all rule and authority and power and dominion...and he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church” (Ephesians 1:20-22).

Even if Jesus’ statement about the coming of the Son of Man pulls us towards a future view, his next statement about “this generation” yanks us back the other way. He tells the parable of the fig tree: when the leaves grow one knows that summer is near. “So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Matthew 24:33-34). Here are three options for understanding “this generation.”⁷⁴

1. This generation refers to the generation of his original disciples.
2. Generation really means a race. The Jewish race will not pass away before the end.
3. This generation is the future generation that sees the abomination of desolation. Once these signs come, the end will occur within a generation.

Although modern interpreters understand “this generation” in a number of different ways, Jesus’ original hearers, Peter, James, John, and Andrew would have thought he was talking about their generation (Mark 13:3). Could both be right? Could it be that Jesus spoke in such a way that it related both to his immediate audience as well as his ultimate audience way off in the future? Perhaps this is too much like eating my cake and having it too, but is God so limited that he couldn’t give Jesus words capable of multiple layers of meaning? Perhaps Jesus grouped the two events—the Temple’s destruction and the coming of the Son of Man—together because of their similarities not their timing. Craig Keener put it this way:

Old Testament prophets often grouped events together by their topic rather than their chronology, and in this discourse Jesus does the same. He addresses what are grammatically two separate questions: the time of the temple’s destruction and the time of the end.⁷⁵

Next Jesus went on to give parable after parable about preparedness:

- 24:42-44 The unpredictable thief: be ready for an unexpected arrival
- 24:45-51 The faithful servant: remain vigilant in your faithful service
- 25:1-13 The ten bridesmaids: when the day comes, it will be too late to prepare
- 25:14-30 The servants and the talents: work hard with what you have to further his affairs
- 25:31-46 The sheep and the goats: judgment will focus on deeds done to the least

⁷⁴ I culled these options from Darrell Bock’s list of six possibilities in his *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament: Luke 9:51-24:53* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), pp. 1688-92.

⁷⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 111-2.

We do well to take these to heart. It is so easy to get caught up in questions of interpretation and chronology and miss our Lord's earnest practical warnings. He has already told us the criteria he will use on the day of judgment (Matthew 7:21-23; 25:34-36). We ignore these at our own peril.

Historical Jesus 14: Last Supper

Judas Iscariot

Why did Judas betray Jesus? Although it is hard to understand why Judas turned Jesus over to the authorities, the Gospels do not leave us without guidance. When Jesus reclined at a dinner in Bethany, Mary anointed his feet with a pound of expensive ointment (John 12:1-8). As the pungent fragrance filled the house, Judas protested, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" Considering that a single denarius was the wage for a full day's labor, Mary's gift must have appeared extravagantly wasteful.⁷⁶ John adds some more information about what motivated Judas' outburst: "He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it."

Jesus defended Mary, arguing that her generous and tender act related to the day of his burial—a day quickly approaching. Still, if greed had motivated Judas, it does not explain betrayal to the point of death. After all, it was not likely that Jesus' death would enrich Judas. We learn a further detail from the last supper when we read that the devil had put it into Judas' heart to betray the Messiah (John 13:2; Luke 22:3). This was no mere misunderstanding or prank; Satan got involved and inspired Judas to his heinous crime. It was during the last supper of Jesus with his disciples that Judas finally went off and told the authorities where and when to capture Jesus away from the crowds.

The First Communion

At the beginning of the last supper, Jesus instituted the first communion. He passed around a cup of wine and a piece of bread to divide among them. At this time, they did not grasp the meaning of his death, but looking back on it, they must have gotten great understanding of this meaningful act. Here is the wording from Luke:

Luke 22:17-20

17 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. 18 For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Who's the Greatest?

Next Jesus warned his betrayer with words that must have made Judas extremely uncomfortable: "The hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" (Luke 22:21-22). This precipitated a dispute among them over who was the greatest. Apparently, their

⁷⁶ Matthew 20:2: "After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard."

discussion about who among them was the worst somehow turned into a discussion about the opposite. Not only did they fail to encourage and comfort Jesus, but instead they fought over who was the best. Jesus settled the issue by turning power on its head. Here is what he said.

Luke 22:25-27

25 And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. 26 But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. 27 For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

True power is found in coming under and lifting up, not dominating from the top down. Next he illustrated his point in an unforgettable way.

Washing Their Feet

Washing someone else's feet is not a pleasant task in any culture. In Israel it was a task for the lowest servant in the household, and yet Jesus offered to do it for his disciples. Wearing only a towel, he knelt before each of his disciples and washed their feet in a basin of water. Peter—ever the impulsive one—protested such a role reversal, but Jesus insisted. If Peter wouldn't let him wash his feet, then he would have no part of him. Then Jesus said the following:

John 13:12-17

12..."Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Just after this impeccable example of humility and service, Satan entered into Judas, and Jesus told him, "What you are going to do, do quickly," though no one at the table understood what Jesus was talking about. Once Judas left the house, Jesus knew the wheels of his arrest and execution were in motion. In just a few short hours, Judas would lead the authorities to arrest him. As a result, Jesus talks about his glorification (John 13:31-32). F. F. Bruce explains:

[T]he Son of Man's suffering becomes the first stage in his receiving of glory and can indeed be spoken of absolutely as his being glorified...If Judas's mind has been made up, the Lord's mind has also been made up. He has accepted the suffering and death which lie ahead, and therefore he can refer to the passion [suffering] and the glory in the past tense; they are as good as accomplished. 'The Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.'⁷⁷

⁷⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel & Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 264, 293.

Upper Room Discourse

After foretelling his betrayal, Jesus begins in earnest to prepare his closest followers for continuing on once he's gone. This is the longest block of teaching in the Gospel of John (including roughly chapters 13 to 17). Of course, I'm not able in the time allowed to explain all of it in detail, so here are some brief summaries:

- A New Commandment (13:34-38)
 - o They must love others as Jesus loved them ; by this will all know that they are Jesus' disciples
- Jesus: the Only Way to the Father (14:1-7)
 - o He's going away and coming back again to receive them to himself and be with them
- Seeing Jesus Is Seeing the Father (14:8-14)
 - o Because Jesus does the works of God and speaks His words, they should believe that he is in the Father and the Father is in him
- The Helper Is Coming (14:15-31)
 - o They won't be orphaned because through the spirit, the Father and His Son will make their home with them
- The Vine Illustration (15:1-17)
 - o Abide in the vine (Jesus) and in this way produce fruit (obedience)
- The World Will Hate Them (15:18-16:4)
 - o The world is going to persecute them just like they persecuted Jesus
- It's to Their Advantage That He Goes (16:5-11)
 - o Jesus' departure is necessary before the helper can come who/which will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment⁷⁸
- The Spirit of Truth Will Guide Them (16:12-15)
 - o Jesus cannot say everything now, but the helper will relay the truth from Jesus
- Sorrow Will Turn to Joy (16:16-22)
 - o After a little while, they won't see him anymore and will experience sorrow, but when they see him again, they will rejoice
- Ask in His Name to Receive (16:23-28)
 - o They will ask the Father in his name, since he is now leaving the world and going to the Father
- They May Scatter but Should Take Heart (16:29-33)
 - o An hour is coming when they will all leave him, but Jesus has said everything ahead of time so that they can have peace and take heart; after all, he has overcome the world

The Prayer

Next, Jesus lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed for an entire chapter (John 17). This is by far the longest of his recorded prayers. It's our best opportunity to listen in to how Jesus spoke to his Father and what sorts of petitions he asked for. Jesus begins the prayer with a sense of

⁷⁸ The word translated "helper" also means an "advocate." Thus, the spirit is the prosecuting attorney, holding the world responsible for their crimes.

accomplishment. He's coming to the end of his ministry. He's done the job God gave him to do. He's glorified God on earth and now asks God to glorify him in return. He has shown his disciples God's character, giving them God's words. As a result, those whom the Father gave him have come to believe that God sent him.

He's now about to go to the Father and prays that his followers be one as he is one with the Father. Jesus has guarded and protected them, losing none except the one the Scripture predicted. He knows that the disciples are going to face a hostile world. He does not pray that God would take them out of the world, but that he would keep them from the evil one and sanctify them in His truth. As God sent Christ, he sends them.

Then, Jesus prays for us. He says, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21). Jesus then repeats his concern for unity so that, once again, the world would know that God sent him and loved him. Next, he prays that those whom God gave him would be able to see his glory with him. Although the world does not know God, these know. Jesus ends his prayer with, "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26).

After praying these words, Jesus went across the brook Kidron to a garden where he prayed some more before his betrayer came at the head of a posse of armed men to arrest him. Next time, we will consider the dramatic events that met him in his last hours.

Historical Jesus 15: Crucifixion

Previously, we were studying the last supper. Judas had already left during the dinner while Jesus taught the rest of the disciples, preparing them for what was to come. After he prayed, they sang a hymn and made their way to the Mt. of Olives.

The Garden

They came to the Garden of Gethsemane⁷⁹ where they were accustomed to go (Lk 22:39). “Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples” (Jn 18:1). This was Jesus’ last chance to escape. Judas was on his way, and Jesus knew it. This was the quiet before the storm. Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I pray” (Mk 14:32), then he took only Peter, James, and John a little farther. Jesus became greatly distressed and troubled and said, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch” (Mk 14:34). After this, he went a little farther and fell to the ground and prayed, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mk 1:36).

Jesus did not want to die; he was looking for a way out. He was no Socrates, eagerly anticipating death. He recognized death as the enemy and tried to avoid it if at all possible. In his distress, he cried out to God and then came back and found his disciples sleeping. He asked, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?” (Mk 14:38). Jesus must have felt so alone. He went away and prayed a second and third time. Each time he came back, they were sleeping. Last of all, Judas approached accompanied by a great crowd: a band of soldiers and officers from chief priests wielding swords, clubs, lanterns, and torches. They arrested him and hauled him off for interrogation.

Before Caiaphas

Caiaphas served as the high priest that year. He had recognized Jesus as a threat but was not planning on doing anything about it until after Passover.

Matthew 26:3-5

3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, 4 and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. 5 But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people."

Judas must have delighted Caiaphas and the chief priests when he provided a way to take Jesus into custody apart from the crowds. Now that he had Jesus, he needed to act quickly. He wanted the proceedings to have a semblance of justice so he fished for testimony, seeking two witnesses who could corroborate some crime Jesus had committed. Many bore false witness against him. Some said, “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands’” (Mk 14:58). But, even on this, they couldn’t agree. Caiaphas, frustrated with the whole process, confronted Jesus directly:

Matthew 26:62-68

62 And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" 63 But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 Jesus said to him, "You have said so.

⁷⁹ gethsemane = oil press

But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." 65 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. 66 What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." 67 Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, 68 saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"

The irony of this situation is so thick. Caiaphas and Jesus both claimed to be God's supreme representatives on earth, to have a special relationship with God, to have unique and intimate access to God, to speak with God's authority, and to act on behalf of the people for their good. One of them is legitimate, and the other is an imposter. The one who was spiritually dead will physically live while condemning the one who had life in himself to death. The whole scene reeked of envy and hypocrisy; it was a supreme miscarriage of justice.

Before Pilate

Do you remember about Pilate from class #3? He really disliked the Jews. For example, once he disguised his soldiers among the rabble and had them stab and slice people with their daggers at a prearranged signal, causing a stampede. Pilate hated it when they pushed him around, but sometimes he gave in. For example, when they didn't want Roman standards in Jerusalem and all offered their necks to Pilate's soldiers to execute them, he yielded. Another time they complained to the emperor Tiberius because Pilate put shields with the emperor's name carved on them on a palace in Jerusalem. Tiberius ordered Pilate to comply, which he did begrudgingly. Generally, he was inflexible, dismissive, and pragmatic.

When they brought Jesus to Pilate, he tried to dismiss him immediately saying, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law" (Jn 18:31): That's when they asked for the death penalty. Consequently, Pilate took Jesus into the Praetorium to interrogate him. He returned and declared, "I find no guilt in him" (Jn 18:38). They responded, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place" (Lk 23:5). Upon discovering Jesus was Galilean, he sent him over to Herod Antipas, who was also in town for the festival. Herod sent him back, and Pilate tried to release him again, appealing to a custom to pardon one prisoner during the feast:

Mark 15:6-14

6 Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. 7 And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. 8 And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. 9 And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. 12 And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" 13 And they cried out again, "Crucify him." 14 And Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him."

From my count, Pilate tried to release Jesus no fewer than 8 times!

1	When they first arrived, he tried to dismiss him	Jn 18:29-31
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2	After the first interrogation, he said he found no crime in him	Jn 18:33-38
3	When he found out he was a Galilean, he sent him to Herod	Lk 23:6-7
4	After Herod sent him back, he decided to punish him and release him	Lk 23:13-16
5	When the crowd requested him to release a prisoner, he put Jesus up, but they insisted on Barabbas instead	Mt 27:17-18
6	When the crowd shouted to crucify him, Pilate argued back and suggested he punish and release him instead	Lk 23:21-23
7	After he had Jesus whipped and dressed in a purple robe w/ a crown of thorns, he brought him out and once again told the shouting crowd to crucify him themselves since he didn't find any crime in him	Jn 19:4-6
8	After he heard Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, he brought him in to the Praetorium and tried to release him	Jn 19:7-12

In a panic, Pilate talked to Jesus one last time:

John 19:9-15

9 He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. 10 So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" 11 Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin." 12 From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." 13 So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. 14 Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" 15 They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

Next, Pilate washed his hands (as if such a symbolic act could absolve him of his command to torture and kill Jesus of Nazareth). Then he ordered his soldiers to crucify him.

Crucifixion

The Roman practice of crucifixion was as brutal as it was public. The point was to dishonor someone while deterring others. They stripped Jesus naked and gambled for his clothes before hanging him on a

wooden cross with nails through his wrists and feet. He hung there until 3pm.⁸⁰ They affixed a sign above his head that read, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Once again, we encounter thick irony. The sign's purpose was to identify the charge for which the criminal suffered execution. Yet, this time, it actually proclaimed the truth. Jesus of Nazareth really was (and is) the King of the Jews. However, the sign inspired mockery rather than faith in all but one of those present:

Matthew 27:39-40

39 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

Mark 15:31-32

31 So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe."

Luke 23:36-37

36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine 37 and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

I can barely read these words without shaking my head in disgust. Such evil is hard to comprehend. Who mocks someone while they are dying? Even so, there was one who stuck up for Jesus:

Luke 23:39-43

39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong:" 42 And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise."⁸¹

This is the ONLY ONE who defended Jesus. He may have been a scoundrel up to this point, but I, for one, want to meet this man someday. I want to shake his hand and say, "Thank you." Amazingly, Jesus made a convert even while his life ebbed away from him. Suddenly, at noon the sky went dark and remained so until Jesus' last moments, three hours later. He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34);⁸² "Father into your hands, I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46); and at last said, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30).

Having endured so many hours of severe abuse, Jesus finally died. Joseph of Arimathea put him in his own, new, rock-hewn tomb. Though many sinned against him, Jesus never lashed out; though reviled,

⁸⁰ Mk 15:25 says it was the third hour when they crucified him. Assuming sunrise was around 6am, that makes the time 9am. Mk 15:33 says darkness fell over the whole land at the sixth hour (12pm). At the ninth hour (3pm) Jesus finally died (Mk 15:34-37).

⁸¹ In v43, I changed the placement of the comma to reflect the fact that Jesus did not need to wait until he came into his Kingdom to vouch for this man. Today, he told him that in the future he would be with him in Paradise (i.e. the Kingdom of God).

⁸² This is a quote from the first line of Psalm 22, which prophesies of many of the details of Jesus' passion.

he did not revile in return; though he suffered, he uttered no threats; instead, he continued entrusting himself to God, the just Judge (1 Peter 2:23). Why did he go through all of this? He had already said why:

Matthew 26:26-28

26 Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 27 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Historical Jesus 16: Resurrection

Jesus' arrest, trials, and crucifixion traumatized his followers. They did not grasp the meaning of his death, nor did they have faith in his resurrection while he lay in the grave. They experienced cognitive dissonance: holding, on the one hand, that he was God's chosen one, while, on the other, they knew he was now dead. The Jewish leaders and Roman government publicly humiliated Jesus, making his death a mockery and spectacle. They reeled in grief, mourning the loss of their friend, their rabbi, their messiah. How could God let this happen?

Appearance to Mary

Then, on first day of the week, Mary Magdalen came to the tomb and noticed the stone was no longer standing in its place. She ran and reported it to Peter and John, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him" (Jn 20:2). She did not give any hint of a belief in Jesus' resurrection; she was merely upset because someone moved his corpse. Peter and John ran to the site and found the tomb empty with the linen cloths lying there and the face cloth folded up by itself.

John 20:10-18

10 Then the disciples went back to their homes. 11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." 14 Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"-- and that he had said these things to her.

Jesus' first resurrection appearance was not to Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, or Joseph Caiaphas. He did not announce the greatest miracle in human history in the halls of power. He did not first show himself to Peter, James, or John. It was to Mary Magdalene, a peasant woman from whom he had cast out seven demons, that he first made himself known (Lk 8:2).⁸³ Just like God's announcement to the no-name shepherds when His Son was born, so Jesus appeared to a simple, godly woman who had genuine faith.

Appearance on Road to Emmaus

Now that the Sabbath was over, some of Jesus' followers decided to go home. They had heard what the women reported, but it sounded to them like an "idle tale" (Lk 24:11). A man named Cleopas and his friend were journeying the seven miles back to the town of Emmaus when a stranger came up to them. It was Jesus, but "their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (Lk 24:16).

⁸³ Like the twelve, Mary had accompanied Jesus on the road along with Joanna and Susanna (Lk 8:3).

Luke 24:17-27

17 And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. 22 Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." 25 And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

They arrived at Emmaus, and Jesus acted as if he would press on, but they convinced him to dine with them. When they sat at the table, he took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. Suddenly, they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. They didn't remain in Emmaus that night but double-timed it back to Jerusalem and reported what happened to the other disciples. By then, Jesus had already appeared to Peter. Just then, in front of everyone, Jesus himself stood among them. Everyone stood there in shock, unable to believe their eyes. Jesus showed them his hands and feet and ate some fish before them.

Of course, there were several other resurrection appearances, but time doesn't permit us considering each. The real question is, "What does resurrection mean?" It means that the Roman cross is flipped upside down—that rather than a symbol of Caesar's right to rule the world through domination, it is instead the symbol of God's love for humanity shown through His beloved Son who gave himself for us. It proves once and for all that Jesus is God's true agent—the Messiah. It teaches us that death is not the end, that God has broken the power of death in Christ, that there is hope for the age to come when God will resurrect the faithful to rule with His anointed one.

Great Commission and Ascension

Jesus' earthly ministry did not end with his resurrection. He spent several more weeks with his disciples before he ascended, speaking to them about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). He told them the promise of the Father—the baptism of the holy spirit—was about to come so they should stay in Jerusalem. They asked him if this was the time to restore the kingdom to Israel. To this question he gave this answer:

Acts 1:7-11

7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Jesus' ascension is not the end of the story. He remains in heaven, in a position of immense authority at God's right hand actively involved with the church until he comes to establish his Father's Kingdom. In the meantime, it falls to us to share the gospel with others and make disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them what Jesus said (Mt 28:18-20).

What will you do? Will you share this gospel about the Kingdom, cross, and resurrection, or will you keep it to yourself like the man who buried his talent? Will you commit to follow him? Will you rejoice when he returns or flee from him in dread? I pray you would believe in his death for your sins, that God raised him from the dead, and that he will come back to establish God's Kingdom here on earth. In the meantime, let's follow him. Come to Jesus.

Matthew 11:28-30

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light